

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

FOR INTERVIEWS, EXCERPTS, AND AUTHOR-PENNEDED ARTICLES CONTACT:

Lorna Garano

[lornagarano@gmail.com](mailto:lornagarano@gmail.com)

510-759-6655

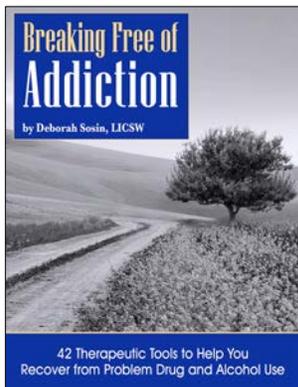
***BREAKING FREE OF ADDICTION OFFERS POWERFUL STRATEGIES  
FOR TACKLING ONE OF TODAY'S MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS***

“If you are willing to face and release yourself from the prison of addiction, this brilliantly constructed guide will provide an ideal companion and support . . .

[and] a powerful pathway of self-awareness and healing.”

—**Tara Brach, PhD**, author, *Radical Acceptance* and *True Refuge*

The statistics are daunting. Nearly 64,000 overdose deaths in 2016 were attributed to the use of opioids, now the leading killer of Americans under 50, according to *The New York Times*. But as attention to the opioid epidemic increases, alcoholism continues to plague Americans at an alarming rate. In fact, an estimated 88,000 people die from alcohol-related causes annually, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.



For over a decade, Deborah Sosin, LICSW, a Newton, Mass.-based clinical social worker, has seen the ravages of addiction firsthand—from alcoholism to cocaine abuse to opioid dependence. In her new book, ***Breaking Free of Addiction: 42 Therapeutic Tools to Help You Recover from Problem Drug and Alcohol Use*** (Between Sessions Resources, November 2017, paperback), Sosin offers a comprehensive set of tools for breaking the grip of addiction, avoiding relapse, sustaining hope, and developing self-care techniques that can lead to long-term success. Sosin, who has worked in an outpatient group practice and a public methadone clinic, is one of only a few clinicians who combine effective cognitive-behavioral approaches with cutting-edge mindfulness practices. Written with compassion and clarity, this essential workbook of interactive exercises is available for individuals as well as those participating in a larger therapeutic program.

SAMPLE EXERCISES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REPRINT. DEBORAH SOSIN IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS. WE CAN ALSO PROVIDE A Q & A WITH THE AUTHOR.

Here is just some of what Sosin can discuss:

- Why mindfulness—the practice of slowing down and noticing what is happening *right now*—is so important for dealing with the difficult emotions and thoughts that can trigger the urge to use;
- Why finding alternative sources of pleasure is crucial to long-term success;
- Why rigid “one-size-fits-all” programs don’t always work;

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- Why creating a vision for the future and maintaining hope are a necessary complement to the “one-day-at-a-time” philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous;
- Why it’s very hard for addicts in recovery to go it alone and why getting involved with a supportive community is essential for maintaining long-term abstinence;
- Why recognizing and working with ambivalence about recovery is a vital motivational tool for relapse prevention;
- Why compassion for people in recovery isn’t just nice, but essential;
- Why it is crucial to teach those in recovery self-compassion skills that they can draw on when faced with shame and judgment;
- How we can change the public conversation around addiction to reduce the rampant stigma and shame around it;
- The opioid addiction epidemic is a crisis, but addictions to other substances also causes tremendous harm and shouldn’t be overlooked;
- Why we should say no to the “Just Say No” approach.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



For more info, visit her at:

[www.breakingfreeofaddictionworkbook.com](http://www.breakingfreeofaddictionworkbook.com)

[www.deborahsosin.com](http://www.deborahsosin.com)

**Deborah Sosin, LICSW**, is a writer and clinical social worker. Since 2004, she has worked at Sameem Associates, in Newton, Mass., specializing in addictions. She also served as a clinical supervisor at the North Charles Institute for the Addictions, in Cambridge, Mass. Ms. Sosin earned her MSW at Smith College School for Social Work and has served on the clinical faculties of the MSW programs at Simmons College, Boston College, and Boston University. She holds an advanced certificate in mindfulness-based psychotherapy from the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy and an MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University. Ms. Sosin is the author of the award-winning picture book *Charlotte and the Quiet Place*, illustrated by Sara Woolley (Parallax Press, 2015). She lives outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

## **SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. **Your book is a collection of exercises designed to help people in recovery**

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**achieve and maintain long-term sobriety. How did you go about choosing the exercises you included?**

I wanted to offer a variety of tools that would be easy, accessible, and appealing to readers in all stages of recovery from problem substance use. There is a logical sequence to the exercises, but people can jump around if they wish. The earlier sections focus on assessing the problem and getting ready to make changes; later, there are specific activities geared toward taking action, connecting thoughts and feelings, building a community, enhancing self-awareness, learning proven relapse prevention strategies, and looking ahead to the future. Many of the exercises are drawn from my clinical experience over the years; some I developed exclusively for the book. In putting together the book, I started with a huge list of possibilities and narrowed it down to those I thought would be fun, useful, and, hopefully, enlightening.

**2. Mindfulness exercises are a big part of *Breaking Free of Addiction*. First, what is mindfulness and, second, why is it useful for people in recovery?**

Mindfulness, in its simplest definition, is noticing what's happening in the present moment, without judgment and with acceptance. Being mindful is easier said than done, however. For people who often use substances to *avoid* being in the present moment, it's a skill that requires patience and practice. People can learn to sit with unpleasant emotions and physical sensations rather than try to escape. They can learn to quiet their anxious mind, be connected to their body through easy breathing or relaxation exercises, and let go of judgment and shame. These are demonstrably effective techniques for breaking free of addiction.

**3. You are a social worker who specializes in working with people struggling with addictions to a variety of substances. Do people who are addicted to different substances struggle with different issues when trying to break free? For example, is someone who is trying to give up alcohol confronted with challenges that are different from someone who is trying to break an opioid addiction?**

Yes and no. Yes, in that opioids have a different chemical effect than, say, marijuana. Alcohol has a different effect than stimulants. And many people use more than one substance, which complicates the chemical picture. Important factors to assess in understanding an individual's road to recovery include: amount, frequency, length of use, tolerance, individual metabolism, concurrent

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mental health problems, and environmental/social factors. Another factor is the presence or absence of withdrawal symptoms (a key indicator of chemical dependence), which can determine whether medical intervention, such as inpatient detox or rehab, or medication-assisted outpatient treatment, is indicated. Ideally, all of those factors would be carefully assessed by a medical and/or mental health professional at the outset.

And no, in that people with addiction often have very similar behaviors and feelings—compulsions, obsessions, all-or-nothing thinking, self-judging, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame; recent research shows that many people in recovery have suffered trauma in various forms. Even when someone is substance-free, those challenges can persist. But with professional help and a safe, supportive network, healing is possible. In my groups, I might have a man in his thirties with a marijuana problem alongside a fiftyish woman with a history of alcoholic drinking and a twenty-something man with heroin addiction. You'd be amazed at how much more they have in common than not.

**4. What is the most important first step that someone who recognizes they have problem substance use might take?**

The most important first step, in my view, is to see a health care professional who is experienced in addictions—that person can then assess the need for medical intervention (detox, medication) and make recommendations. If a specialist isn't immediately available, people should consult with their primary care physician and discuss openly and honestly what's going on. Stopping using certain drugs and substances on one's own can be dangerous, even fatal, in some cases, such as during alcohol or benzodiazepine withdrawal. Whether someone is struggling with the effects of illicit (illegally procured) substances, or prescription drugs, or a combination of prescription and nonprescription drugs, the treatment plan must be carefully assessed and monitored.

**5. One thing you are very direct about in the book is encouraging readers to discuss their possible ambivalence to recovery. In one exercise, you urge them to make a list of the pros and cons of tackling their addiction. Why is this important and do you find that people are often hesitant to admit that they might not totally want to be in recovery?**

Most, if not all, people with addictions are ambivalent about change. And most of us can relate—changing habits is hard! Even if we're suffering severe negative

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consequences, we might not be ready to take action. Anyone who is trying to lose weight, cut down on caffeine, or quit smoking cigarettes can relate. An approach called motivational interviewing, originally developed by psychologists William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, addresses these normal, understandable mixed feelings. Laying out the perceived positive gains alongside the negative consequences can help people tip into realizing that the negatives ultimately outweigh the positives. For instance, a heroin user might admit, "Getting high makes me feel relaxed, euphoric." A trained professional wouldn't judge or criticize that remark, as a family member might. Then, that same person might express the downside, which all people with heroin addiction know: "I might die of an overdose." Sadly, some people with problem substance use are simply not ready or motivated to change—they value the pros over the cons. They deny or minimize the negative consequences of their use and are resistant to any treatment or efforts at intervention. That is a serious, challenging problem that researchers, clinicians, and public policy makers are struggling to tackle.

**6. How can people identify the triggers that make them want to use and how can they find alternative, healthy ways to address them?**

Once people acknowledge that they have a problem and are ready to start making changes, they can begin by learning about and labeling their feelings, such as anger, loneliness, sadness, boredom, anxiety, and fear. These common internal triggers aren't even conscious sometimes—mindfulness can help make people become aware of and accepting of their feelings. External triggers can include people, places, and things—whether it's a difficult relationship, a stressful job, a certain social situation, etc. "I ran into my old girlfriend at a party and I wanted a drink." "I lost my father and all I want to do is get high." Naming the triggering situation, then naming the feeling that arises, opens the road to making a *choice*, rather than going on automatic pilot ("... and the next thing I knew, I was at the bar pounding down shots"). As far as alternatives, some clients have been getting high for so long, they have no idea what they could do instead. In the book, I have several exercises to help people work on their triggers, as well as a long list of healthy, alternative activities.

**7. You talk about the need for compassion when treating people with addictions. Why is this so important and how do you think the public conversation around addictions discourages (or encourages) compassion for this population?**

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Since the opioid epidemic has been in the headlines, more people are beginning to discuss addiction in a different, less judgmental light. People are hearing that no one chooses to be an addict. And that it can happen to anyone. But much stigma and criticism still exists—they're "just junkies," "losers," "liars, cheaters, manipulators," "they could stop if they wanted to," etc. Addiction is a powerful, complex problem that often leads people to act in ways that may go against their own better instincts and desires, even their own morality, sometimes. We must learn to separate the person from the behavior and treat the person with compassion and respect. They are not their addiction.

**8. How can people with addiction go about developing self-compassion, particularly when they are facing judgment or shame, both internally and externally?**

I have some exercises in the book that help people identify their inner dialogue, that is, what they tell themselves about their addiction and themselves. Many people feel ashamed, guilty, scared, helpless, hopeless, and overwhelmed. Developing new voices, voices of hope and self-compassion, can help people revise that critical dialogue: "I am OK as I am. I forgive myself. I am trying hard and deserve support. I'm allowed to make mistakes. I'm allowed to ask for help. If I relapse, it doesn't mean all is lost." Self-compassion is more than just reciting positive affirmations—it's opening one's heart to oneself, with love and respect and patience, in the same way one would toward a loved one with any illness or mental health problem.

**9. In *Breaking Free of Addiction*, you stress the importance of community in the recovery process. What are some ways to connect with communities that have been effective in helping people stay sober?**

One of the first things I tell my clients is, "This is too hard to do alone!" I encourage all clients to join a group, whether facilitated by a professional or self-help groups such as Alcoholics (or Narcotics) Anonymous or SMART Recovery. When people join with others in the same situation—and meet sober people who've "been there"—their feelings of isolation and shame can drop away. They can connect with others in healthy, sober ways and share strategies for relapse prevention. Engaging in other community activities such as exercise classes, sports teams, adult-ed courses, musical groups, spiritual or religious meetings, or volunteer organizations, can help people feel more connected and motivated as well.

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**10. Several exercises emphasize maintaining hope and creating a vision for the future. This seems to contradict the well-known Alcoholics Anonymous motto of “One Day at a Time.” Can you explain how they might go together?**

Mindfulness and AA philosophies are similar in that they emphasize paying attention to the present moment and not fast-forwarding into the future. However, I have found that a balance is important. People want reasons to stay sober over the long haul, as giving up their go-to coping mechanism is a big loss. That’s why I invite people to imagine the life they really want; to begin to identify their strengths and passions; to think about their goals and dreams; to tap in to their “wise” selves versus their “addicted” selves; and be *actively engaged* in shaping their lives, which means the possibility of joy as well as inevitable suffering. Without hope, it’s hard to stay motivated. And motivation can then be supported, one day at a time.

**PRAISE**

“If you are willing to face and release yourself from the prison of addiction, this brilliantly constructed guide will provide an ideal companion and support. Grounded in the transformative practices of mindfulness and the best of Western psychological wisdom, *Breaking Free of Addiction* offers a practical and powerful pathway of self-awareness and healing.”—**Tara Brach, PhD**, author, *Radical Acceptance* and *True Refuge*

“A valuable companion for anyone who wants to stop using drugs or alcohol. The whole book is inspired by mindfulness—the power to change your life through self-awareness and self-kindness. It gives readers a chance to explore every corner of their lives at their own pace. Written with smarts and clarity, but never preachy, this workbook will guide you into a more meaningful life and teach you important skills to make it stick.”

—**Christopher Germer, PhD**, Lecturer, Harvard Medical School; author, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*

“Addiction, whether it manifests as an unwholesome habit or dependence on a substance, touches all human beings and is a particularly urgent issue amid the current opioid crisis. In her beautifully written and organized book, *Breaking Free of Addiction*, Deborah Sosin has addressed the subject of addiction treatment in a way that is direct, pragmatic, and inspiring. Her artful linking of the practice of mindfulness with recovery engages simultaneously the understanding of a problem and the empowerment to approach it with curiosity and confidence.

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The workbook format at the same time orients and educates as the reader is challenged to coauthor both the book and his or her own life by completing thoughtful exercises and practicing embodied awareness. Who surrenders to and succeeds in recovery continues to be a mystery. In the dual diagnosis partial hospital program where I work, we are always looking for creative resources and I find *Breaking Free of Addiction* to be a remarkably thorough and effective guide for both practitioners and those aspiring to heal."

—**Lawrence Peltz, MD**, author, *The Mindful Path to Addiction Recovery: A Practical Guide to Regaining Control Over Your Life*; addictions psychiatrist and medical director of Bournewood-Caulfield partial hospital program, Woburn, Mass.

"A beautiful and wise collection of resources for recovering and rebuilding your life from addiction."

—**Christopher Willard, PsyD**, Lecturer, Harvard Medical School; author *Growing Up Mindful and Raising Resilience*

"Deborah Sosin's book is a welcome addition to the growing resource literature for leveraging mindfulness skills to address one's challenges with addiction. Her book is very accessible and provides a wide range of tools for deepening awareness of one's addictive patterns, as well as effective methods for changing them."—**Mitch Abblett, PhD**, author, *The Heat of the Moment in Treatment: Mindful Management of Difficult Clients*; and the upcoming *Five Hurdles to Happiness and the Mindful Path to Overcoming Them*

"Unlike many self-help books, this one is actually based on the science of addiction. It attempts to destigmatize addictive disorders by using supportive, nonjudgmental language. It incorporates the latest in addiction treatment, such as the Stages of Change Model and client-centered interventions. The book is well organized, with each activity building upon the next. The exercises are holistic, comprehensive yet readily approachable and achievable. Each exercise has a similar structure and format, which should assist clients in successfully completing each step. I particularly liked the "Does this sound like you?" sections, which give clients concrete and realistic scenarios in which to compare their current situation. Although the book is designed for clients, it is also a great tool for clinicians who are doing individual and/or group work with clients struggling with substance use disorders."

—**Patrick Griswold, MSN, MEd, RN, LMHC, LAC**, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Services, Addiction Studies, Metropolitan State University of Denver; Adjunct Faculty/Instructor, Department of Nursing, UMass Medical School, Worcester, Mass., MCPHS University, Worcester, Mass.