

10
PROVEN
TECHNIQUES

Rein In Your Brain

FROM IMPULSIVITY TO
THOUGHTFUL LIVING IN RECOVERY

Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, with Victoria Costello

Endorsements for *Rein In Your Brain*

“Rarely do writers reveal such a transparent look into how they personally survived the overwhelming life circumstances that led to the creation of a practical and profound way of healing and change for the rest of us. And it’s for everyone—from the professional counselor or educator to the shattered person recovering from addiction and childhood trauma. A must-read for all who have waited for a genuine, real-world application of the valuable truths revealed in brain research.”

—Jean M. LaCour, Ph.D., founder/CEO of NET Institute,
Rise Professional Recovery Coaching

“Having been a major advocate in the field of addiction treatment and recovery, Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, and her colleague Victoria Costello, have written an empowering book that allows the reader to take another significant step in their recovery. You will better understand both the behavior and its underpinnings that keep you emotionally and relationally stuck in recovery while being given a plethora of tools to practice that will move you forward. Congratulations to the authors for offering a major contribution to our field.”

—Claudia Black, Ph.D., author of *It Will Never Happen to Me*

“I have rarely come across a book that is as well written, insightful, and filled with practical exercises that can benefit us all. *Rein In Your Brain* is a must-read for anyone interested in the heart and science of improving their relationships!”

—Rokelle Lerner, clinical director, InnerPath workshops

“*Rein In Your Brain* is inspirational, informative, and filled with simple yet profound suggestions to change from living a life filled with impulsive, instinctual reactions to one marked by reflective, respectful responding. Cynthia Moreno Tuohy is a recovery ‘thriver,’ not just a survivor. Her own recovery story that she courageously shares is filled with life and relationship lessons and wisdom. Anyone who has struggled with dysfunctional actions, emotional reactions, and relationships will be able to connect with and learn from the ‘Ten Big Ideas’ she describes. They offer practical, psychologically sound, and sophisticated advice and strategies that can change lives. The book is filled with helpful self-assessments and suggestions to recover from our automatic, self-defeating, ‘limbic’ reactions and sense of loss of control with a goal of building a life filled with peace, passion, and purpose that respects both self and other. Though they are easier to read than to incorporate into our lives, Cynthia’s Ten Big Ideas offer wonderful ways to support recovery and wellness.”

—Dr. Carlo DiClemente, ABPP, Presidential Research Professor
of Psychology at University of Maryland, Baltimore County,
and cocreator of the transtheoretical (stages of change) model

Rein In Your Brain

*From Impulsivity to
Thoughtful Living in Recovery*

Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II,
with Victoria Costello

Hazelden®

Hazelden
Center City, Minnesota 55012
hazelden.org

© 2014 by Cynthia Moreno Tuohy
All rights reserved. Published 2014.
Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication, either print or electronic, may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the express written permission of the publisher. Failure to comply with these terms may expose you to legal action and damages for copyright infringement.

ISBN: 978-1-61649-467-4

Editor's note

The names, details, and circumstances may have been changed to protect the privacy of those mentioned in this publication.

This publication is not intended as a substitute for the advice of health care professionals.

Alcoholics Anonymous and AA are registered trademarks of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

16 15 14 1 2 3 4 5 6

Cover design: Theresa Jaeger Gedig

Interior design: Kinne Design

Typesetting: BookMobile Design and Digital Publisher Services

To my children, Rudy Moreno and Chelsea Mikel, who evidenced the change in our family and are amazing adults whom I love and respect. My children have grown up influenced by the Big Ideas in this book, and today they lead a much different life of wellness in relationships than the generation that birthed them. I am grateful to their fathers for giving me such beautifully spirited children and for teaching me lessons that assisted my growth, both personally and professionally.

To my current husband, Christopher Tuohy, who has been a cheerleader as the work on this book was growing and changing, just as in the seasons that it took to write, through the sun, rain, and snow.



*“Whatever games are played with us, we must
play no games with ourselves, but deal
in our privacy with the last honesty and truth.”*

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xv
The Beginnings of a Life Lived in the Limbic	1
A Brief Lesson in Neuroscience: Goodbye Limbic, Hello Thinking Brain	15
The Ten Big Ideas	
Big Idea 1: Stand Still in the Moment	25
Big Idea 2: Do Not Assume Intent	47
Big Idea 3: Dig Deeper into the Conflict	79
Big Idea 4: Cultivate Confusion	95
Big Idea 5: Understand the Paradox of Control	105
Big Idea 6: Dismantle the Wall of Misunderstanding	129
Big Idea 7: Create a Blameless Relationship with Yourself	145
Big Idea 8: Avoid Premature Forgiveness	163
Big Idea 9: Put Down Your Dukes	171
Big Idea 10: Take Responsibility for Self-Fulfilling Prophecies	195
Appendix A: How Will I Rein In My Brain?	207
Appendix B: Phrases That Come from the Cortex	211
About the Authors	213



Acknowledgments

Today, and every day, I am deeply grateful to my family of origin and the life given to me, the lessons learned and relearned, and the passion in my inner being, my soul, and my heart to work with individuals and families yet to be in recovery, which resulted from my life experiences. I'm also grateful for and honored by the clients who have given me the opportunity to work with them, some now in almost thirty years of recovery and others working to achieve that first beginning of recovery. I'm always and in all ways reminded how insidious the diseases of addiction are, how powerful the recovery process is, and of the synergy of people loving people to take those first and ongoing steps in the process of change.

Addiction recovery is a lifelong process. Trauma recovery is also a lifelong process. We all are in recovery from something—just living in this fast-paced world of “get it done, do it well, be something or someone” brings huge stress to the persons we are inside the shell we wear daily. This book is meant to bring hope—hope for recovery in addiction, trauma, life! Without hope, there is no light to recovery.

There are thousands of addiction counselors, educators, and other professionals whom I have had the extreme pleasure to

work with in some capacity. They are my heroes and colleagues—I treasure them. Many addiction counselors and other helping counselors have been trained in the *Rein In Your Brain* concepts and life patterns of change. They are in communities around the globe, ready to assist you in your growth and change process. At NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, we train and support counselors to use these tools to serve others. These counselors carry the hope of recovery and the belief that change is possible. Please connect with them when you need more professional support and guidance. They are “earth angels”!

My colleagues at NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, our executive committee, and leadership have given me a place to grow and belong for more than thirty years. They have become my extended family and support group. It is important for all of us to find an environment that will nurture us and help us develop—and for many of you that will be your church, temple, mosque, tribe, Twelve Step group, and other support groups. It is important to lean toward those with whom you can connect and grow. My prayer is that you find this connection if you have not already.

We all have families, and I am blessed to have my older sister, Kathy, and brother, Jess, still in my life. In my adult years, reconnecting with my four half-siblings has been a wonderful addition to my life. It has not been easy for Jeffrey, Mary Margaret (“Tiny”), Greg, and Rhett to connect to a family from which they were distanced in many ways. They have shared beautiful stories of our father, Jess, and the love we all share for him is immeasurable. It, too, is a lifelong process to recover the family that was shattered. In the process of family reconstruction, my stepfather, Cliff, and his wife, Judith, have entered heart and soul to help us reclaim the positive and beautiful stories of our mother, Doris. And they brought with them Victoria—the person who collaborated with

me on this book. Her expertise, wisdom, and commitment to this book boosted my belief in the reality of this book. To Mom and Pop Bickford, who loved us, and loved us the best they knew how. To Ann and Dwight—my foster parents—and their daughters, for raising me up: physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Without your intervention and continued support, I believe my life would have ended long ago.

Hazelden has been an organization that I have learned from for many years, from the treatment model to their education programs, and I am thrilled that our paths have crossed on this book.

A special dedication to Chuck DeVore, M.A., who taught me about anger management and conflict resolution, gave me some of his materials and his vision, and then died, suddenly, before he could assist me as cowriter. His words, teachings, and spirit live on in this book. I believe he is smiling in heaven, happy to know that others will be touched by the work that we meant to build and share with each of you, together. His wife, Gwen, is the other lovely gift he left behind, and I am grateful to have her supporting me in this work.

So, we don't know what we don't know, and I did not know where my Higher Power was taking me when I began this journey in my family of origin. My belief is that nothing is wasted, not any of the trauma or difficulties. My hope for you as you read is that you integrate and pass it on!

Blessings,
Cynthia



Introduction

At every age, people learn best by example. This is why religious texts use parables and stories to teach important lessons, like the Good Samaritan who helps a stranger, or Job who never gives up no matter what awfulness comes his way—and so on. In the same way, this talent for imitation is why the behaviors our parents teach us early—when our brains are most impressionable—stick with us throughout our lives. This is either good news or not so good news, depending on how well your parents steered their own lives and how much they taught you about being a responsible driver of your own.

As the youngest of my parents' three children, I became a ward of the state at the age of eight months. By fifteen, I'd been in and out of forty homes. With no stable family of my own, I counted on alcohol and drugs, my peers, and a budding career in petty crime to sustain me and soothe my pain.

How and why did my parents allow such terrible things to happen to my siblings and me? My mother and father were intelligent and well-intentioned people who—because they'd never been shown a better way to handle their impulses, and inherited vulnerabilities to alcohol and drug addiction—lurched from one experience to another, exerting little self-control and even less reflection

on their actions. As a result, they often made their own lives miserable, and they did a dreadful job of raising us.

My life story is worse than many, although not as bad as others. In this book, I share some of the difficult experiences I faced as a child and adolescent to demonstrate how hard times can lead to the negative habits of mind and behavior that so many of us in recovery confront in ourselves and others. These episodes of abuse, neglect, despair, and loneliness forced me to learn certain tough lessons very early in life. Other people may face similar trials well into their adulthoods, for example, when relationships, family strife, or financial devastation create chaos in their lives.

Regardless of when they occur, such trips to the edge of what we think we can possibly bear can also be a catalyst to push us in a new direction. Perhaps a loss or major disappointment has led you to explore a new path at this time and place in your life! If so, welcome! I invite you to think of this book as a GPS, a handy device sending you a steady stream of directions to guide you through the process of leaving fear-driven, self-defeating thoughts and behaviors in the past. I promise, if you proceed step by step, in the course of this journey, you will uncover a new and happier you—not someone who is foreign to you, but a version of yourself that has been there all along, hiding behind a lifetime of negative habits.

Like many people struggling with addiction, I was saved from a life of misery through daily acts of self-care and participation in a community of people committed to their own recovery. I've also spent three decades as a practicing addiction counselor and, more recently, working with addiction professionals as both a trainer and an advocate for our profession. And yet, like many of you, even as I talk the talk and walk the walk of recovery, I still occasionally experience frustration when those old negative habits of mind sneak back in and “make me” revert to self-destructive ways of thinking and being—everything I associate with addiction and

the pain that came before I accepted the help of others who've traveled this route before me and shared their lessons.

You'll note the term *addict* is nowhere to be found in the previous paragraph. I prefer to use "person in recovery" or any other phrase emphasizing the process of recovery. This helps reduce the stigma attached to the term *addict*. *Addiction* in this book refers to a variety of addictive substances and patterns, among them alcohol and drugs, sex and pornography, food, gambling, and addictive relationships.

Through my ongoing study of the "science of addiction and recovery," and, after talking with and training thousands of my professional peers, I've distilled from addiction recovery what I call the "Ten Big Ideas" and put them into a self-help format for easy use by recovering people and their families. Let me be the first to say, these are not brand-new ideas; to the contrary, each of these Ten Big Ideas is a tried-and-true concept adapted from the addiction recovery and social work professions. Some or all of them are being used by addiction professionals in counseling and treatment centers, and by individuals in self-help and community-based programs around the world.

This experiential approach is designed to help anyone, and especially those already committed to sobriety, make the next leap in addiction recovery. Many of these concepts will feel intuitively "right on" to you, but may seem too difficult to apply in your day-to-day life. I encourage you to try to stick with it. The exercises illustrating each Big Idea are designed to show you how to replace the old fear-driven habits of impulsivity that can stay long after the "substance" is gone with the new habits of a thought-based way of life.

I devote a chapter to each Big Idea, explaining what it means and how it works in "real life." I'll share my own experiences and the personal stories of people I've worked with as a counselor and

trainer. I'll also share some fictional vignettes, which illustrate what happens when we confront impulsive words and actions in ourselves and others, and I'll encourage you to try out new ways of thinking and behaving.

Before we dive into the Ten Big Ideas, I present a very brief lesson in neuroscience. Simply put, in order to rein in our impulses, we must get to know our brains better. The insights I share come from the latest advances in brain imaging and from the work of cognitive psychologists. Their work sheds light on exactly how our brains can lead us down the “wrong” path, and how our capabilities for rational thought and self-control can help us reverse course.

It sounds like heady stuff (pun intended)! While the science may appear highly technical, the solution to ending old counterproductive behaviors is often as simple as using mindfulness techniques to gain self-awareness and employing different words and phrases to express everyday thoughts and feelings. If you give the Big Ideas and exercises the opportunity to work, you can and will make profound changes in your life. While most of my examples refer to intimate relationships (dating, marriage, etc.), the Big Ideas can be applied in almost any relationship (coworkers, relatives, children, etc.).

To begin the process of understanding and learning how to work the Ten Big Ideas, I ask that you open your heart and mind to whatever resonates from the factual information, vignettes, and personal stories to come. You will find it useful to keep a pen and paper nearby. Sometimes family photos can also help jog your memory about “how it was” when you were growing up, or help you recall what transpired in an earlier relationship. Remember that each person brings a different life script to this endeavor. That means each of us will take a slightly different path in our journey through recovery.

Ten Big Ideas from Addiction Recovery

- Stand Still in the Moment (and back up the train)
- Do Not Assume Intent (take away the blame game)
- Dig Deeper into the Conflict (discover)
- Cultivate Confusion (remove the wall of misunderstanding)
- Understand the Paradox of Control (see that it's not necessary to control)
- Dismantle the Wall of Misunderstanding (get not to my truth or your truth, but *our* truth)
- Create a Blameless Relationship with Yourself
- Avoid Premature Forgiveness (go beyond “Whew! I’m off the hook”)
- Put Down Your Dukes
- Take Responsibility for Self-Fulfilling Prophecies (know your past, change your future)

After working these concepts with thousands of people in clinical treatment and in workshops around the world, I see the fallout that results from unchecked impulsivity as a nearly universal challenge. I’ve also seen and heard with my own eyes and ears how, if you let yourself go into the heart of each idea and try the exercises offered in each chapter, you will be much closer to a level of fulfillment you’ve only ever dreamed about before.

Blessings,
Cynthia



The Beginnings of a Life Lived in the Limbic

The only way we can change the future—for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren—is to accept who we are in the present. To make meaningful changes to our present thoughts and behaviors, we must also understand the forces from the past that shaped us. Beginning in this chapter, and in bits and pieces throughout the book, I offer my personal journey as a way to illustrate the Ten Big Ideas. You'll also find exercises for reining in your brain and finding a more thoughtful way to live in recovery.

At each juncture, my hope is that you'll reflect on not only how our life experiences may be similar (or different), but also on how the hurts and hard lessons in any life can produce limiting and painful habits of mind and behavior. By witnessing each other's wounds and owning our own, we can untie the ropes of habit and begin to walk into a less fettered future.

My Story

My mother, Doris, gave birth to me, her third child, at age nineteen. When I was born, she and my father, Jess, lived in a working-class part of Walla Walla, in Western Washington State. In the first of countless family disruptions and breakups initiated by my mother's

reckless actions, she took off when I was less than a year old. She left without a word of explanation, and with no note or phone call to explain her disappearance, leaving my father to wonder if she'd been kidnapped or killed. He would eventually learn that Doris intentionally deserted him. And she did it to have a shot at realizing her dream of being on the stage—an ambition that took her a thousand miles away to Miami, Cuba, and Southern California.

To say that Doris was uninterested in the role of mother is only partly true. Sporadically, she wanted it desperately and would reassert her maternal rights to pull me out of whatever situation I'd landed in since her last exit. I suspect Doris's returns occurred more because she found it socially difficult to admit she wasn't capable of being a mother, rather than out of any real sense of duty. My mother, who suffered from largely untreated bipolar disorder, had other priorities. Among them, she hoped to become a dancer, an actress, or a model, and live unencumbered in her addictions.

A Family Living in the Limbic

My father's response to his wife's desertion was to drink—a lot. It was his way of dealing with conflict and myriad life circumstances that were no longer working for him. Given his time and place, what else did he know to do? Neither he, nor anyone of his generation, understood that as human beings we are capable of “reining in” impulsive actions emanating from our “limbic brains.”

If you're not accustomed to reading about brain research or science, please don't panic about my use of unfamiliar scientific words or concepts. Although neuroscience (the study of how our brains work) is more popularly discussed today, understanding the difference between impulse versus thought-based behaviors and their connection to opposite parts of the brain is a much newer area. I'll get into much more detail about how the limbic system feeds impulsive behavior and how these more extreme tendencies can be reined in by the cortex, or “thinking brain,” in the next

chapter. For now, suffice it to say that the instincts emanating from our limbic brain take over our thoughts and actions when we're faced with the pain of abandonment or any other perceived threat to our sense of security.

At times like those, the ancient “mammalian” part of your brain steps in to prepare you for “fight or flight.” Our ancient ancestors depended on their fight-or-flight instincts for survival. We've all had such moments—when we feel as if a twenty-foot-tall woolly mammoth is barreling down toward us, and we have no way out. If one were to judge by the limbic-driven, impulsive behaviors of my parents and other “role models” in my early life, it might have seemed like my family had been constantly surrounded by a herd of stampeding mammoths. In fact, it was simply the day-to-day challenge of work, raising children, and maintaining adult relationships that undid the adults in my world.

In the wake of my mother's departure, and my father's emotional unraveling, other family members helped out as much as they could with housekeeping and childcare. But when minding three little kids became too much for everyone, we were moved to a group home in Moses Lake. And, with this first move, I began serving an eighteen-year sentence as a ward of the state, a child under the care and control of the court and foster care system.

I don't know how long we stayed at the Moses Lake facility or how much time passed in each of the many foster and family homes and group situations following that first placement. Until puberty, my memory consists mainly of fragments of frequently dramatic, sometimes violent, events ending one situation and leading to another.

My mother's inconsistency about what she wanted, or could handle, as a parent probably made my childhood worse than it would have been had she simply left for good. I'm told that some thirty-three months after she first took leave, my mother returned

in person, asking my father if she could see her children for a few hours. My father, so grateful to lay eyes on the woman he still loved and so missed, gave in. But she never made it back to his house that day. Instead, as soon as she put us in the car, we took off for Los Angeles.

It did not take long for the responsibilities of parenting to conflict with her career as a sometime dancer and model, and her struggle with addiction. Less than six months after taking us, she called my father and asked him to come get us. Once we were back in Washington State, it then didn't take long for him to realize he couldn't handle us either—so off we went to another home. At this point, to our great relief, the paternal grandparents we called “Mom” and “Pop” stepped in and asked the state to give them custody, taking the three of us into their home. At this point I was four years old.

Maybe it was Doris's finding out that we were living with her disapproving former in-laws that led to the next upheaval. Soon after we were settled in with our grandparents, she filed in court to get custody back for herself. I have vivid memories of the court hearing where this battle played out: my brother, sister, and I sitting in the back of an immense courtroom listening to the muffled voices of both our parents as they made their cases to a judge. Once they sat down, the judge asked for a private audience with the three of us kids. From the combative courtroom, we were escorted to his cozy, wood-paneled chambers, where I immediately felt safer. To my surprise, the judge seemed genuinely interested in our opinions of our parents, and he asked whom we would choose to live with. All three of us were of the same mind. We didn't want to go back to either of them; we wanted to live with our grandparents, “Mom” and “Pop.” The judge smiled and gave us each a lollipop before we were ushered back to the courtroom to hear his verdict. I remember feeling so happy and relieved.

But the verdict was not what I expected. The judge announced that we were going back to the sole custody of our mother. We would be leaving with her—immediately. And then he hammered his gavel and left. I couldn't understand what had just happened. Instinctively, I screamed and held onto the bench when my mother tried to take me by the hand and lead me away. My brain was already telling me this was trouble, and my survival depended on fighting to remain with my grandparents. Even if the judge didn't know it, at four years old, I was absolutely certain that Mom and Pop were the only sane and stable adult figures in my life.

No matter. Off we went in a yellow convertible with my mother and Cliff, the attorney who by then had become the man in her life, back to LA to live in isolation from the family we knew and loved. You will not be surprised to learn that this new situation didn't last long. Mother blew it up with her drugging, drinking, and cheating. Nonetheless, her court victory had me relocated to Southern California, which became my home for nearly a decade. It was there that several significant things happened to me—most of them no good.

It's not hard to imagine how so much chaos shapes a young heart and brain, and how a child's brain moves to protect itself from the resulting stress and pain. Not having a home or parent figure for a sustained period of time damaged my sense of self and any notion of security or trust I might have developed. Abandonment became my middle name. Having no sense of personal power or control in life left me feeling powerless. Later, being physically and sexually abused caused me to feel worthless and incapable of defending myself—and so I compensated by becoming tough on the outside. On the inside, however, I was a sad and hurt little girl.

Tough on the Outside

When I entered puberty, I started running with other kids who were doing the same insane things that I was doing to make my life

seem more manageable, like turning to drugs and petty crime. I became such an expert at the deviant life that, by age eleven, I formed my own girl-gang. Actually, I thought of us more as a girlie-girl club—girls doing whatever it took to take care of ourselves.

My probation officer at the time first used the term *juvenile delinquents* to describe my friends and me. Looking back, I can see that the other girls and I were like laboratory rats running on treadmills, keen on receiving a coveted reward. We chased our highs on a daily basis by skipping school, drinking, and taking drugs regularly—any kind of drug. We sniffed glue, binge-drank, and eventually graduated to using speed. We were also physically tough and got very good at beating up other teenagers, including boys.

Before long, my girlfriends and I became master thieves and fencers of stolen goods—with a method to our madness. We would go into fancy department stores to study the layout, and then plan how to tear through and take as much jewelry as we could. Then we'd sell what we stole to other kids. Most of the time, I'd use the money I made shoplifting to buy food and clothes, sometimes sharing my bounty with my brother, Jess (named after our father). By this point in puberty, I'd developed rickets, a result of poor nutrition and, most likely, my early drug use. I craved fruit, milk, and other foods we weren't getting at home, so I used the money to buy them.

Where were the authority figures in my life during this time? The caseworkers and probation officers assigned to me never saw my potential. They missed the fact that it took great organizational and leadership skills, as well as creativity, to do all that I was doing just to survive. So did the teachers and principals at my elementary and junior high schools, who never seemed to notice the pain I was in, or how it was shaping my behavior. They didn't understand that I needed to inflict my pain on others, just as I felt it was being inflicted on me.

My father moved back to Southern California from Washington State to be closer to his kids. It was in Southern California that my father remarried. The woman he married, Peggy, quickly gave birth to two children of their own. Unfortunately, my father had not learned from the mistake he'd made marrying my mother, and it wasn't long before this became evident. Peggy was just as troubled and dangerous as my mother—in her own way.

My mother, having split from her husband Cliff, had a difficult time making it on her own. She would get desperate with managing three children and ship me off to some “aunt and uncle,” who were not relatives but friends, to substitute for parents. When these living arrangements didn't work, I ended up with my father and Peggy.

In another stunning rerun of his first marriage, Peggy ran away. There was my father, abandoned again, feeling unbearable pain. No doubt, memories of past hurt and rejection came flooding back to his brain, and his mammalian limbic brain once again engaged in a fight for survival. Soon, we were all on our way back to Washington State to find Peggy and the babies.

Trying Again to Be a Family

With all of us once more in Washington State, my father and Peggy reconciled, and things were quiet as we worked to settle into a new house. It was a tight squeeze with four of us kids sharing one bedroom: Jess, the two babies, and me. My sister Kathy had gone to Washington State to live with our mother. (Mother had a way of keeping my older sister with her and leaving my brother and I to fend for ourselves.) However, the change in location did little to reduce the patterns of abuse, denial (on my father's part, about marrying another unstable woman, as well as his drinking), and the acting out that had already become my *modus operandi*.

Home life quickly deteriorated. Terrible fights ensued between Peggy and me. Peggy had her own way of trying to control me and

my life. She would have me care for her babies, clean house, and cook after getting home from school, and then just before my father was due to arrive home, she would begin to beat me for not “doing what I was supposed to do.” My father would walk in the door to this chaos, not knowing what to do for fear that if he tried to interfere, she would leave with his new set of babies. There were times when the scratches were so deep on my arms and back, and the hair pulled from roots, that blood was running in several directions. I would run from the house looking for someone to care and protect me from the craziness in which we lived.

Finally, after one fight too many, I ran away from their house and refused to go back. And once again, my paternal grandparents took me in. Sometime later, on my urging, they also brought Jess—who had been farmed out again to foster care—to come live with us.

In the summer of my fifteenth year, things had finally reached something like calm in my grandparents’ home with my brother Jess and me. Unsurprisingly, that was exactly when my mother stepped back in to destabilize us all over again. At the beginning of that summer, she invited Jess and me to spend a month with her and my sister, Kathy, on the west side of Washington State. Why she thought having us with her was a good idea, it’s hard to say. It’s likely she wasn’t thinking much at all. In a short time, her daily regimen—crystal meth, with a cocktail of booze and barbiturates to help her come down—soon became ours. We were children modeling what we thought was the “cool way” to be.

This is a common dynamic when the so-called grown-ups in a household abdicate the responsibilities of adulthood. Little or no thought is given to child development or age-appropriate behaviors. These adults live each day to the fullest—with a single-minded goal to meet their need to get high, in whatever way works or is available to them at the time.

Many of us who become addicted in adolescence are mimick-

ing these parental behaviors. Part of our later pain comes from feeling neglected and abandoned by mothers and fathers who weren't there for us. The habit of self-medicating this kind of pain then becomes habituated as a defensive coping mechanism.

I recall waking up after a month of living this lifestyle and feeling sick from whatever I'd ingested the night before. I walked through the living room to the kitchen and saw the same disgusting mess—dirty dishes and clothing, old newspapers, layers of dust, and dying plants—everywhere. It dawned on me that this was a very dangerous life for my brother and me to be living, even though our mother was at the center of it. I went and found Jess and said, “We need to do something different or we'll turn out just like her.”

“What should we do?” he asked.

“I'm not sure,” I said. But then an idea came to me. “Maybe we should go to that church . . . you know, the one with the youth group in the building where Pop did the stone work.” However illogical, I thought that if my grandfather had worked there, that church must be a good and safe place to be.

My brother's eyebrows shot up.

“Church?” he said, pointing out that it was not our “usual” habit to attend church. “So why now?” he wanted to know.

I couldn't explain it. I just knew that hooking up with that church in my grandparents' town was the only way out of the downward spiral we had fallen into with our mother.

So, a few days after getting back to Mom and Pop's house, Jess and I joined the youth group run by a nice couple, Ann and Dwight, whom I came to trust. With their guidance, still living with my grandparents, I tried hard to stay out of trouble, prepared to go to school in the fall, and mowed lawns and did gardening to make money. I bought clothes and started looking and feeling better than ever, and pretty darn cute—all five feet of me

with my brown ponytail, miniskirts, and still hard-to-repress sassy attitude.

Most important, I was no longer using substances to get by.

Things Fall Apart

It was a tenuous time for me. Sobriety and stability were still new. Then I fell “in like.” The infatuation happened at an end-of-summer dance when I was still fifteen. I met a boy named Arnie and from the moment we first danced, he decided I was “the one” for him. I was delighted to be someone’s dream girl, and so Arnie became my boyfriend. We kept a low profile and took our courtship slow, enjoying the process of getting to know each other. Unfortunately, a cousin of mine told Mom and Pop about it. They became terribly upset—not so much over the fact that I had a boyfriend, but that this boy was Mexican.

On the day they found out, my grandparents let me know in no uncertain terms that I could no longer have Arnie as a friend. In fact, soon after I went to bed that night, they came into my room and made it clear that I was forbidden to ever see him again. If I defied them on this, they warned me, I would go back into foster care. Not just me, they said, but my brother, too! Despite the late hour, I ran out of their house.

I felt crushed. The only place I could think of going was to the church. When I got there, the building was dark, but I was operating in survival mode, so I sneaked into the chapel. There, in the sanctuary, I stomped and yelled about the injustice of it all. Then I fell to the floor and cried my eyes out. I cried about Arnie, and everything else in my life that was missing—all the ordinary things a fifteen-year-old wants that I’d never had, like love, safety, and someone to believe in me.

I told the Lord that this was just not right. After all, I had turned my life around and handed it over to Him, and yet more terrible things were happening to me. If I continued seeing Arnie,

I would hurt my brother and get us both kicked out—and, most likely, separated again. Apparently, I screamed, cursed, and cried loud enough to get the attention of the church secretary who was working down the hall, and she notified the youth group leader, Ann, at her home.

Ann came walking through the sanctuary door with a worried expression on her face.

“What’s wrong, Cindy?” she asked.

My first response was “Nothing!”

After Ann did some coaxing, I let her in a little, saying, “It’s no use. Here I am cleaned up, going to school, working hard, and they take away the one thing I want: the one person who really cares about me. It’s not fair. Aren’t we supposed to love everyone?”

Ann kept her hand on my shoulder and just let me cry. When I finally ran out of tears and looked up, she said, “You can’t see it now, Cindy. But God works in mysterious ways. Try to have some faith. All these troubles you see around you now just may help things turn out for the better—in the long run.”

“Yeah, all you Christians say things like that,” I said. “They don’t mean anything!”

I wanted to believe Ann. But it was hard. She told me I’d have to accept her statement on faith. Little did I know how right she was, how much my life would turn around—for the better and from that point on.

Two weeks later, Ann and Dwight were given an emergency foster-care license, which permitted them to bring Jess and me into their home and hearts. I was so amazed that they trusted us enough to allow us into their home with their two young daughters. At fifteen years old, I had finally been placed with a family that could help me heal the wounds of my past and find new ways to feel and think.

When you’re not given any reason to trust, you don’t. The

bottom line was that up until this point in my life I knew I had to fend for myself—even if I did so in all the wrong ways. Oddly, even as the youngest of three children, early on I knew I possessed a reservoir of inner strength that I had to call on to protect myself or my siblings. Like a flower blossoming in the desert, with the unconditional love offered by Dwight and Ann, this inner strength of mine eventually did re-emerge and in healthier, less defensive (limbic-driven) ways. In fact, the same leadership potential that I'd once used with my girly-girl gang would bring me to the work I'm doing in workshops around the world and sharing with you in this book.

A Young Brain Shaped by a Fear of Pain

When we're afraid, the limbic brain drives us to seek the short-lived comfort of impulsive behaviors—for present purposes, let's call them “the old ways.” One common impulsive action that many of us learned at a very young age was abusing substances to avoid feeling more pain. Over time, these impulsive, self-medicating actions led us to addiction.

As anyone in recovery is aware, the behaviors stemming from addiction include neglecting our responsibilities and dumping uncontrolled negative feelings onto those we love and ourselves, ruining many relationships in the process. These are the results of a brain operating on autopilot with the limbic system in control.

My personal story offers multiple pictures of the limbic brain in action: my father's drinking to stave off the pain of abandonment; my mother's running away to pursue a dream at the expense of her husband and children and, ultimately, to the detriment of her own mental health. Of course, my teenage tough girl persona came straight out of my limbic brain. Each of these defensive personas and the actions they produced were driven primarily by a deep-seated fear—of being alone, of never being considered “special,” of being hungry or hurt—among many others.

Our actions were futile attempts to avoid—or take flight from—the conflict, hurt, disappointment, or other difficult emotions our lifestyles and poor choices had generated. In these behaviors, we were acting on our limbic brains.

Do You Want Off the Treadmill?

What if there were a way to get out of this cycle of fear and reaction? What if you could defuse your fear and settle a conflict at home or work without entering the endless loop that has never gotten you anywhere beyond a short-term reward? What if a new behavior could lead you to meet your deeper unmet need? Would you take it? At this point, I suspect your answer is closer to “maybe” than “yes.”

You’re no doubt thinking, at least a little bit, that this other way of dealing with conflict is not reliable and as such may leave you vulnerable to all those people out there whom you *know*, in your heart of hearts, are out to get you.

Without using the language of science, my last foster parents, Ann and Dwight, introduced me to a life no longer ruled by fight or flight. It was they who first showed me that by trusting myself, and responding differently to people and things, my everyday life could be less difficult—and far more rewarding. Their greatest lesson, the one I return to throughout this book, is this: When thought comes before action, we no longer have to live in reaction and fear. However, before we can appreciate and apply those more positive ideas, we must understand the past—both our personal past and that of our human species, for they are one and the same.

About the Authors

Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, is the executive director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals. She previously served as the executive director of Danya Institute and the Central East Addiction Technology Transfer Center. Prior to this she was the program director for Volunteers of America–Western Washington, serving homeless populations and dealing with the co-occurrence of poverty and substance abuse issues. She has also written training components and manuals about working with adolescents, adults, and seniors; school intervention; involuntary commitment; community mobilization; intensive outpatient treatment and continuing care; the foundations of addiction practice; medication-assisted recovery; impaired driver programs; employee assistance programs; and gang intervention and treatment.

Victoria Costello is an Emmy Award–winning science journalist who has established a national platform through her publishing and advocacy work in mental health and wellness. In January 2012, she released her memoir, *A Lethal Inheritance: A Mother Uncovers the Science behind Three Generations of Mental Illness*. Her co-authored works include *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Child &*

Adolescent Psychology (2011), written with child psychiatrist Jack C. Westman, M.D., M.S.; *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Chemistry of Love* (2010), written with evolutionary psychologist Maryanne Fisher; *The Everything Parent's Guide to Children with OCD*; and *The Everything Guide to a Happy Marriage*, both written with Stephen Martin, M.F.T.

Hazelden, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden offers a comprehensive approach to addiction that addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

A life of recovery is lived “one day at a time.” Hazelden publications, both educational and inspirational, support and strengthen lifelong recovery. In 1954, Hazelden published *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the first daily meditation book for recovering alcoholics, and Hazelden continues to publish works to inspire and guide individuals in treatment and recovery, and their loved ones. Professionals who work to prevent and treat addiction also turn to Hazelden for evidence-based curricula, informational materials, and videos for use in schools, treatment programs, and correctional programs.

Through published works, Hazelden extends the reach of hope, encouragement, help, and support to individuals, families, and communities affected by addiction and related issues.

For questions about Hazelden publications,
please call **800-328-9000** or
visit us online at **hazelden.org/bookstore**.

Other titles that may interest you:

Craving

Why We Can't Seem to Get Enough

OMAR MANEJWALA, M.D.

A nationally recognized expert on compulsive behaviors explains the phenomenon of craving and gives us tools to achieve freedom from our seemingly insatiable desires by changing our actions to remap our brains.
Order No. 4677 (softcover), EB4677 (e-book)

12 Stupid Things That Mess Up Recovery

Avoiding Relapse through Self-Awareness and Right Action

ALLEN BERGER, PH.D.

Berger explores the twelve most commonly confronted beliefs and attitudes that can sabotage recovery, and then provides tools for working through these problems in daily life.

Order No. 3001 (softcover), EB3001 (e-book)

12 Smart Things to Do When the Booze and Drugs Are Gone

Choosing Emotional Sobriety through Self-Awareness and Right Action

ALLEN BERGER, PH.D.

Berger draws on the teachings of Bill W. and psychotherapy pioneers to offer twelve hallmarks of emotional sobriety that, when practiced, give people the confidence to be accountable for their behavior, ask for what they want and need, and grow and develop a deeper trust in the process of life.

Order No. 2864 (softcover), EB2864 (e-book)

Hazelden books are available at fine bookstores everywhere.

To order from Hazelden, call **800-328-9000**

or visit **hazelden.org/bookstore**.

“Rein In Your Brain is inspirational, informative, and filled with simple yet profound suggestions to change from living a life filled with impulsive, instinctual reactions to one marked by reflective, respectful responding.”

*** Dr. Carlo DiClemente, ABPP, Presidential Research Professor of Psychology at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and cocreator of the transtheoretical (stages of change) model

Those in recovery learn to “rein in their brain,” ending compulsive behaviors while fostering a more thoughtful lifestyle that ensures long-term emotional sobriety.

Addiction—whether to mood-altering substances, gambling, sex, or food—stems in part from an overreliance on the reward system of a primitive part of the brain that can push us to make poor choices based on an expectation of immediate gratification. Those of us in recovery often struggle with the compulsive thoughts and behaviors that are still programmed in our addictive brains well after the drinking and drugging have stopped. These often play out thoughtlessly in our interactions with others, damaging our relationships and growth as balanced human beings.

Rein In Your Brain offers ten tools for breaking the cycle of impulsivity. These time-tested self-interventions include standing still in the moment, understanding the paradox of control, and not assuming the other person’s intent. By incorporating these tools into your daily interactions, your relationships can move from those of conflict to mutual respect and understanding.



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II,

is the executive director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals.

Victoria Costello is an Emmy Award-winning science journalist known for publishing and advocacy work in mental health and wellness.

Cover design: Theresa Jaeger Gedig

Hazelden®

hazelden.org

800-328-9000

Order No. 2519

ISBN 978-1-61649-467-4



USA \$14.95

CAN \$17.50