



Why I Named My Addict — And How It Helped Me Be Me

by Matt T.

Early in my recovery, someone encouraged me to give my addict a name. It sounded a little strange at first, but I quickly came to see the wisdom in it. Naming my addict helped me see him as separate from my true, authentic self. My addict's name is **JJ**, short for **Jerky Junior**, because, frankly, my addict is a jerk.

Over the years, I've encouraged my sponsees to do the same. I've heard them name their addicts things like *Adam* or *Seth*. Sometimes a sponsee will say to me, "Adam's been talking to me a lot lately," and that's our way of knowing they're struggling. It gives us language to separate their authentic self from the part of them that wants to sabotage everything.

Recently, I spent some time writing out who JJ is and who I really am — who **Matt** is. That exercise brought me some powerful clarity.

What It's Like When I'm in JJ's Grip

When I'm deep in my addiction, it's hard to tell where JJ ends and Matt begins. I see the things JJ wants me to do as simply *what I want to do*. That's when I'm most lost. It's when JJ and Matt appear as one person.

I've tried countless ways to control JJ over the years. I thought maybe I could bargain with him, set limits, or figure out clever strategies to keep him contained. But all that ever did was give JJ more power. The more I focus on JJ — trying to outthink him or negotiate with him — the stronger he gets.

JJ doesn't care about me at all. He's selfish to the core. He'll take as much power as I give him. His ultimate goal is to destroy me, the authentic Matt. He needs me to feel small. And he's cunning — he knows exactly where my cracks and weaknesses are, and he's relentless. JJ never sleeps. He's a skilled liar. He acts like he's my buddy, promising relief or excitement. But there is no goodness in JJ. Only destruction.

I've learned the hard way that I can't control JJ by putting borders around him, placating him, arguing with him, or trying to soothe him. That just hands him the keys. JJ wants to meet real needs in my life — needs for connection, comfort, escape — but with solutions that are ten times more costly than the healthier, harder, but ultimately life-giving ways I could meet those needs.

There's no hard time in my life that JJ can't make worse. Acting like he doesn't exist or is powerless over me is a surefire way to hand him control. Even describing JJ and what I've thought, said, and done under his influence can feel like I'm attacking myself — but that's just another one of JJ's lies.

Bringing JJ Into the Light

Step 1 of my recovery is all about shining a light on JJ. It's about admitting he's powerful over me, that I can't control him, and that trying to has wrecked my life in all kinds of painful ways. This step is hard. JJ pushes back when I try to expose him. He tells me that if I drag him into the light, it'll embarrass me. But here's what I've found: JJ never leaves, but he **loses power every time I bring him into the light and stop resisting**.

Of course, the fallout from JJ's influence is still mine to deal with. Some people I thought were my friends were really just JJ's friends — people who encouraged or enabled the worst in me. My authentic self has had to learn to steer clear of them.

I know JJ may always be somewhere in my field of vision. I might notice him. But he only gets power when I focus on him, talk to him, or resist him. When I'm living as my authentic self, JJ is just a powerless shadow. The longer I stay in recovery, the clearer, more separate, and more distant JJ becomes.

Who the Authentic Matt Is

And who is the authentic Matt? I've come to see that my authentic self is good. That part of me is JJ's enemy. But I have to be careful, because my own distorted thinking can still open the door for JJ to come back in. The more I get in touch with who I really am, show myself grace, and feed the best parts of me, the less power JJ has to influence me.

It's also helped me to realize that all addicts have their own version of JJ. In fact, it's often easier for me to see someone else's authentic self and their JJ than it is to see my own. That's part of why I stay so involved in sponsoring and helping other addicts. I can help them see the difference, encourage their true selves, and watch them separate more and more from their JJ. That's a gift that keeps giving back to me too.