

# Myers Counseling Group

## E Booklet on

# Substance Abuse

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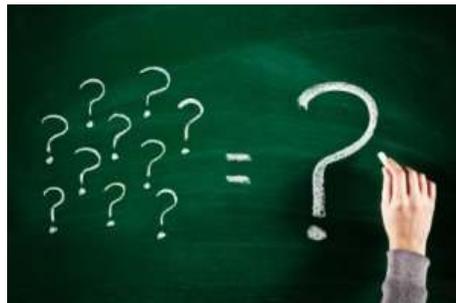
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# Chapter 1

## How to Determine If You Have a Substance Abuse Problem.

Substance abuse is a complicated topic to address. What is problematic for one individual may not be for another. Identifying it as a problem lends itself, to some degree, to subjective interpretation. If there are two or more parties involved, this lends itself to subjectivity from all parties. To further complicate matters, abusers do not want to give up their use. Most enjoy the using experience for whatever purposes it derives, and are reluctant to give it up. The part that enjoys use, wants to convince the other half everything is okay. Deceptive messages about the impact of use are presented, not only to the outside world, but to users themselves.



When we are determining the extent of a problem, it is not just based on quantity of use, but quality as well (quality of life). An individual could drink only four times a year and have more problems than someone who drinks daily. Outside factors, such as family, employment, law enforcement, friends, or health care providers, could help determine the extent of the problem.

The first step in assessing the problem is asking the right questions. The best way to determine if you have a problem is looking at your life areas. Is your use creating problems at home? Do arguments with family center around your use? Have family members expressed concern about your use? Do you lose time from work due to your use? Are you violating your employment substance abuse policy and risking sanctions? Has your use affected your performance at work. Has any health care provider (doctor, therapist) expressed concern about your use? Do you hide information about your use from the family doctor? Do you feel guilty because of your use? Do you hide or lie about your use? Does your use conflict with your value system? Have you experienced financial difficulties due to your use?

Answering yes to even one of these could indicate a problem. This does not mean you are a drug addict or alcoholic, but should raise some serious concerns about your use. If your use is conflicting with these life areas, it certainly is a time to evaluate the benefits of your use and the costs it has on your family.

## Chapter 2

### Helping Children Cope with Their Parents Drug or Alcohol Problem

Parents with a substance abuse problem are not always aware of the impact of their problems on their children. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that 6.6 million children under the age of 18 live in a house hold with at least one alcoholic. Seventy six million Americans, about 43% of the U.S. adult population, have been exposed to alcoholism in the family, and almost one in five adult Americans (18%) lived with an alcoholic while growing up. They also note that children of alcoholics possess a genetic vulnerability to become alcoholics themselves

The stress of living with a substance abusing family member affects the entire system even when children are not obviously aware of the substance abuse. The tension in the marital relationship, the unpredictability of the using parent, family interaction patterns, and the anxiety of the home environment, increase the likelihood of developing low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, school and social problems.

Most of the time, families do not talk about the substance problem. This is even if it clearly a problem. This is what is referred to in the substance abuse field An Elephant in the Living Room. Families tend to avoid discussing this issue even if it is as obvious as an elephant in the living room. A child growing up in this environment internalizes events and learns to keep quiet

about what is clearly a problem in the family. This impacts on their own self confidence and causes a disconnect between what a child recognizes as normal and what actually may be normal. They carry this expression into adulthood and later relationships.



The National Association for Children of Alcoholics identifies 7 C's to help children with the challenge of having a substance abusing parent.

- I didn't cause it. Children may feel responsible for their parent(s) use. Sometimes this is reinforced by the alcoholic parent, blaming the child for their use.
- I can't cure it. They may believe if they could magically do something the problem will go away.
- I can't control it. Children of alcoholics often try to hide or throw away their parent(s) substances. The belief is this will stop the use.
- I can take care of myself by communicating my feelings. A big part of their recovery and emotional stability lies with being able to communicate what they are feeling and seeing. Equally important, is the ability for them to feel validated and to have their perception of reality confirmed.

- I can make Healthy choices. Since children of substance abusers are more susceptible to being substance abusers themselves, they need to know they are more vulnerable to this problem. Understanding what they grew up with was not normal and that they can make healthier choices than their parent.
- I can celebrate myself. Their parent(s) use does not define them and they need to separate themselves from that belief. Not depending on parent(s) approval and developing confidence in oneself, is an important emotional task to address for the child of an alcoholic.

## Chapter 3

### Addressing Your Teenagers Substance Abuse.



Parents and children have different value systems. What may seem important to a parent will most likely be several levels down in importance to an adolescent. Adults bring different life experiences and perspectives into their relationship with kids. It should not come as a surprise then, that parents and some kids may differ on how they view drug use/abuse. Marijuana, synthetic marijuana, and nonmedical use of prescription drug use among teens, has increased over the last five years (National Institute of Drug Abuse). Parents are faced with the challenge of new synthetic drugs that are more powerful and deadly than ever before.

First, it is helpful to distinguish the difference between use and abuse. If you discover that your child is **using** substances that do not mean he/she is **abusing** them. However, you also need to keep in mind that in most cases when a parent discovers their teen using substances that most likely would not be the first time their child has used. A parent's job is to intervene and make sure that patterns are not established. The longer use goes on, the more difficult it would be to break the reinforcement and benefits

they perceive from their use. Another factor to keep in mind is the longer use goes on with a youth, the less they are able to utilize their own problem solving and coping skills to address life's challenges.

If you discover your child to be using drugs expect some denial or minimizing of their use or problems. It is important to remember that energy is best spent getting your child to stop use, not as much as to convince your child that their use is bad. Their life experiences and perceived consequences of use are different than yours, so convincing them at this point may be a hard sell.

The focus should be on giving them a clear message use is not to be tolerated and the consequences that will be attached if they continue to use. If another parent is involved, make sure you are on the same page. When parents present inconsistent messages, the limits they try to set will be ineffective. Make sure rules are clear and direct and the consequences are clear as well.

This does not mean you should not have conversations about your child's use.

Dialogues regarding use and how a teen perceives benefits from use are important. This could help you gather information on what benefit they may be getting from their involvement with substances. It could help shape your future interventions and direct your child in a constructive way. Moving forward, monitoring of your child's activity should be continued. Once trust is reestablished, a discussion about parameters for an adolescent could be pursued.

Failure for your child to adhere to your requests to stop using, could indicate a bigger problem than you anticipated. At that point, talking to a professional, with or without your teen present is needed. The professional could further evaluate the use and develop strategies to discourage their involvement in use.

## Chapter 4

### Tools for Making Changes Someone with a Drug or Alcohol Problem



Denial and resistance are common in addiction. Substance abusers often times deny or minimize the severity or consequences of their use. When they do this, they are trying to convince themselves as much as others. As problematic as their use may be, a part of them just does not want to give it up. It is easier for them to minimize the impact of use than face the challenges of abstaining and ramifications of their use.

A person who abuses drugs or alcohol, seeks out the high. When they use, the substance stimulates the reward center in their brain and creates an enjoyable emotion. However, in time, the brain becomes rewired. Individuals who continue with use become dependent on the drug to feel good, losing their own natural ability to feel good on their own. Furthermore, as time goes along, they become dependent on the drug to deal with challenges they face. Their problem solving and coping ability becomes greatly diminished. This creates a dependent feedback loop where they turn back to the drug to help them cope or escape reality.

Identifying that there is a problem is the first hurdle. We need to understand that although substance abuse has created a negative impact on someone's life, it does not take away from the enjoyment they receive from it. Furthermore, a lifestyle may have been developed revolving around the use, making it even more challenging to stop.

Abusers need to remember the consequences of their use. Separating the desire to use (urge) from what you feel you need to do (abstain). In the recovery field this is referred to as the Addictive Voice. It is the voice inside addicts that tries to minimize consequences, underestimate relapse situations, and make excuses to use again. The sooner one could recognize this voice, the more promising their recovery.

The next area to address is making a firm commitment to recovery. Establishing goals that would support this commitment are important. The more gray area(ambiguity) there is in their commitment the more chance there is in the "voice" winning over. "I will stop using drugs" versus "I will slow down my use" are two different statements. The latter statement is hard to measure and allows wiggle room. The former is easy to measure and commits to a direction.

Lifestyle changes will also need to be examined. This involves looking at situations that increase the chance of a relapse. Examining changes include people, places, activities, and/or events is an extremely important part of the recovery process. It is helpful to know that urges will happen, this is the nature of addiction. Learning to create gaps from when you experience an urge and the access to the target of that urge are important in recovery. The less access one has to carry out the urge, the

more likelihood the sober voice will win out. Urges will eventually go away. If you give into the urge, it will only come back stronger the next time.

Recovery is an ongoing process. It is helpful to build on a sober network and create a sober lifestyle. Just deciding to stop may not be enough. Additional support could be accessed through support groups (see our [website](#) for a listing of support groups) and/or professional help (counseling). There are many roads to recovery and individuals need to decide which one best fits their journey. It is clear that the further along patterns of use are established, the more difficult it may be to change them. However, no matter how firmly established the use is, change is possible for everyone.