

# Drug and Alcohol Addiction



**Disclaimer:** All material on this brochure is provided for general information purposes only and should not be considered medical advice or consultation.

## Alcohol and Drug Abuse Hurts Everyone in the Family

Dependence on alcohol and drugs is our most serious national public health problem. It is prevalent among rich and poor, in all regions of the country, and all ethnic and social groups.

Millions of Americans misuse or are dependent on alcohol or drugs. Most of them have families who suffer the consequences, often serious, of living with this illness. If there is alcohol or drug dependence in your family, remember you are not alone.

Most individuals who abuse alcohol or drugs have jobs and are productive members of society creating a false hope in the family that "it's not that bad."

The problem is that addiction tends to worsen over time, hurting both the addicted person and all the family members. It is especially damaging to young children and adolescents.

People with this illness really may believe that they drink normally or that "everyone" takes drugs. These false beliefs are called denial

## It Doesn't Have to be That Way

Drug or alcohol dependence disorders are medical conditions that can be effectively treated. Millions of Americans and their families are in healthy recovery from this disease.

If someone close to you misuses alcohol or drugs, the first step is to be honest about the problem and to seek help for yourself, your family, and your loved one.

Treatment can occur in a variety of settings, in many different forms, and for different lengths of time. Stopping the alcohol or drug use is the first step to recovery, and most people need help to stop. Often a person with alcohol or drug dependence will need treatment provided by professionals just as with other diseases. Your doctor may be able to guide you.

### ***If you have ever considered that you might have a substance abuse problem ask yourself these simple questions!***

1. Have I ever felt I should cut down on my drug use or drinking?
2. Have people annoyed me by criticizing my drug use or drinking?
3. Have I ever felt bad or guilty about my drug use or drinking?
4. Have I ever had an "eye-opener", a drink or drug first thing in the morning to steady my nerves or get rid of a hangover?
5. Have I ever awakened one morning, after drinking / drugging the night before and realized I couldn't remember parts of that evening?

**If you have answered "yes" to two or more of these questions, you may have a problem.**

## Family Intervention Can Start the Healing

Getting a loved one to agree to accept help, and finding support services for all family members are the first steps toward healing for the addicted person and the entire family.

When an addicted person is reluctant to seek help, sometimes family members, friends, and associates come together out of concern and love, to confront the problem drinker. They strongly urge the person to enter treatment and list the serious consequences of not doing so, such as family breakup or job loss.

This is called “intervention.” When carefully prepared and done with the guidance of a competent, trained specialist, the family, friends and associates are usually able to convince their loved one – in a firm and loving manner – that the only choice is to accept help and begin the road to recovery.

People with alcohol or drug dependence problems can and do recover. Intervention is often the first step.

### DEFINITIONS

**Tolerance** is a biological state of adaptation in which exposure to a drug induces changes that result in a reduction of one or more of the drug's effects over time.

**Dependence** is a biological state of adaptation that is manifested by a drug class-specific syndrome that can be produced by abrupt cessation, rapid dose reduction, decreasing blood level of the drug, and/or administration of an antagonist.

**Addiction** is a primary, chronic, neurobiological disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestation. It is characterized by behaviors that include one or more of the following: impaired control over drug use, continued use despite harm, and craving.

### **Children Need Help Too!**

Children in families experiencing alcohol or drug abuse need attention, guidance and support. They may be growing up in homes in which the problems are either denied or covered up.

These children need to have their experiences validated. They also need safe, reliable adults in whom to confide and who will support them, reassure them, and provide them with appropriate help for their age. They need to have fun and just be kids.

Families with alcohol and drug problems usually have high levels of stress and confusion. High stress family environments are a risk factor for early and dangerous substance use, as well as mental and physical health problems.

It is important to talk honestly with children about what is happening in the family and to help them express their concerns and feelings. Children need to trust the adults in their lives and to believe that they will support them.

Children living with alcohol or drug abuse in the family can benefit from participating in educational support groups in their school student assistance programs. Those age 11 and older can join Alateen groups, which meet in community settings and provide healthy connections with others coping with similar issues. Being associated with the activities of a faith community can also help.

### **Resources for Information and Help**

There is help available in your local community.

- Look in Yellow Pages or search online under Alcoholism for treatment programs and self-help groups.
- Call your county health department and ask for licensed treatment programs in your community.
- Keep trying until you find the right help for your loved one, yourself and your family.
- Ask a family therapist for a referral to a trained interventionist or, call the Intervention Resource Center at
- **1-888-421-4321.**

### **Self-Help Groups**

Alcoholics Anonymous [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)  
Al-Anon Family Groups [www.al-anon.org](http://www.al-anon.org)

Alateen  
[www.alateen.org](http://www.alateen.org)

Adult Children of Alcoholics  
[www.adultchildren.org](http://www.adultchildren.org)

For a pastoral counseling center in your community, visit  
[www.aapc.org](http://www.aapc.org)

### **For More Information**

SAMHSA's National Helpline  
1-800-662-HELP  
[www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

National Association for Children of Alcoholics  
[www.nacoa.org](http://www.nacoa.org)

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence  
[www.ncadd.org](http://www.ncadd.org)

