

COPING WITH CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

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Chemical dependency is an area where information and increased awareness can be very helpful to us all. This article will focus on alcoholism because alcohol is the most frequently abused drug. Alcoholism is one of many difficulties which can impact on an individual's work performance. The Employee Assistance Program (E.A.P.) is a broadly-based program which can assist with any kind of family, marital, personal, legal, health or work-related problems.

Some Facts about Alcohol

Alcohol, contrary to popular belief, is a depressant, not a stimulant, and is probably the oldest mood-altering drug in the world, with a variety of social, ritual and medicinal purposes.

Alcohol is used socially by 80% of adult Canadians. The per capita consumption has doubled since 1950 just as the rate of alcoholism has since the 1960s.

In moderate amounts the sensation is one of warmth, stimulation and/or relaxation. With increased amounts, motor coordination, visual ability, reaction time and respiration are decreased, and dramatic mood changes can occur. The liver metabolizes alcohol at a fixed rate equal to about one drink per hour. Eg. 1 1/2 ounces whiskey, 5 ounces wine or 12 ounces beer. Consuming more than this amount causes the alcohol to build up in the blood resulting in higher blood alcohol levels. Someone weighing 150 pounds would require about three drinks per hour to attain a Blood Alcohol Level of .08. Someone weighing less would need fewer drinks.

Physical Dependence: A person requires the presence of alcohol in the body to function normally.

Tolerance: After frequent use, the body has adjusted to the chemical presence and requires larger and larger amounts to produce the desired effects.

Psychological Dependence: A strong emotional need to take the drug and experience its effects has been created.

Turning Point: At what point does a person cease to be a benign social drinker and become chemically dependent? It is estimated that 10% of Canadians are addicted to alcohol and that, in turn, impacts in a significant way, on 5 other people in his/her immediate environment such as spouse, children, boss, co-workers etc.. Alcohol becomes a problem when it creates problems for the drinker in one or more of the major areas of life such as family life, social life, health, work and the law.

Dynamics of the Disease: Alcoholism is a progressive illness, which means it does not get better on its own. A victim sincerely has the intention to limit intake but is unable in reality to do so. The very nature of the disease inhibits a person from exercising the insight required to evaluate his/her behaviour and seek out remedial care.

What You Can Do

Before you attempt to intervene in any way, you might examine the nature of your relationship with the person you are concerned about. You need to really care about the individual in order to motivate him/her to get the necessary help.

Try not to get caught up in the alibi system which is the hallmark of the addicted person. In order to drink, the individual must devise an elaborate denial system, and by doing so, may often distort reality. The object of your discussion is to express your concern and support, but also to create a clear image of how others perceive the individual's drinking.

Listen for the denial and bear in mind that the dependent person has an investment in convincing you that they do not have a problem and can stop at any time. The problem drinker may become angry and put you on the defensive. You risk changing your relationship for a time