

THE WARNING SIGNS OF ADDICTION

The following information was provided by The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.

WARNING SIGNS:

The use and abuse of drugs are serious issues that should not be ignored or minimized, and we should not sit back and hope they just go away. If left untreated, use and abuse can develop into drug dependence. As a result, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of drug abuse early. If you're worried that a friend or family member might be abusing drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look for:

1. Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse

- Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal.
- Frequent nosebleeds—could be related to snorted drugs (meth or cocaine).
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain.
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy.
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance.
- Injuries/accidents and person won't or can't tell you how they got hurt.
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing.
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech, impaired or unstable coordination.

2. Behavioral signs of drug abuse

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school; loss of interest; decreased motivation.
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, teachers or classmates.
- Unusual or unexplained need for money or financial problems; borrowing, stealing; missing money or valuables.
- Silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors.
- Sudden change in relationships, friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies.
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents, illegal activities).

3. Psychological warning signs of drug abuse

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing.
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation.
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appearing lethargic or "spaced out."
- Appearing fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DRUG DEPENDENCE:

Drug dependence involves all the symptoms of drug abuse, but also includes another element: physical dependence.

1. TOLERANCE: Tolerance means that, over time, you need more drugs to feel the same effects. Do they use more drugs now than they used before? Do they use more drugs than other people without showing visible signs of intoxication?

2. WITHDRAWAL: As the effect of the drugs wear off, the person may experience withdrawal symptoms: anxiety or jumpiness; shakiness or trembling; sweating, nausea and vomiting; insomnia; depression; irritability; fatigue or loss of appetite and headaches. Do they use drugs to steady the nerves, stop the shakes in the morning? Drug use to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of addiction. In severe cases, withdrawal from drugs can be life-threatening and involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation. These symptoms can be dangerous and should be managed by a physician specifically trained and experienced in dealing with addiction.

3. LOSS OF CONTROL: Using more drugs than they wanted to, for longer than they intended, or despite telling themselves that they wouldn't do it this time.

4. DESIRE TO STOP, BUT CAN'T: They have a persistent desire to cut down or stop their drug use, but all efforts to stop and stay stopped, have been unsuccessful.

5. NEGLECTING OTHER ACTIVITIES: They are spending less time on activities that used to be important to them (hanging out with family and friends, exercising or going to the gym, pursuing hobbies or other interests) because of the use of drugs.

6. DRUGS TAKE UP GREATER TIME, ENERGY AND FOCUS: They spend a lot of time using drugs, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects. They have few, if any, interests, social or community involvements that don't revolve around the use of drugs.

7. CONTINUED USE DESPITE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES: They continue to use drugs even though they know it's causing problems. As an example, a person may realize that their drug use is interfering with ability to do their job, is damaging their marriage, making problems worse, or causing health problems, but they continue to use.

After you've had enough dialog to determine that alcohol or drugs are currently part of the person's life, the following questions will help assess if there is an actual addiction to a substance (substance abuse).

1. Think about a typical day/week. On how many days do you engage in this substance or behavior? How many times per day?

2. Over the past year, tell me about the times you have tried to stop. How has that gone?

3. How are things going at work/school? Has your use been disruptive?

4. Are you able to function daily without using? Tell me about your mornings. Do you need to use to get going?

5. So, I know these two guys named Guilt and Shame. Sometimes they help people and sometimes they push people around. Do you know them? Tell me about your relationship with them.

6. Can you recall a time when you blacked-out or you had a hard time remembering what happened the night before?

7. Tell me about a time when you took an unusual risk to get your drugs or alcohol? Maybe a time your use caused a harmful situation?

8. Have you progressively needed more of the substance? Or use more often?

9. Has anyone ever commented that they think you need to stop using or cut-down drinking?

10. How well are your relationships going with your family or longtime friends? If you are getting answers to these questions that further confirms that the addiction is current and acute, there is a strong indication that this person needs additional help. If they are currently under the influence, detox treatment may also be required.

(For treatment additional resources call 1-800-NO ABUSE)