

THE PROGRESSION OF ADDICTION

PHASE 1. Experimentation: This is the first time someone uses. It is literally an experiment because they've never done it before. Once the person knows what the effect will be, he or she is no longer experimenting. So It Is erroneous to say, "Joe is experimenting with marijuana on the weekends." Once Joe knows what the effects of marijuana feel like, and he does it again, the experiment is over. He is then using marijuana on the weekends, rather than experimenting with it.

PHASE 2. Seeking the Buzz: This is the next phase, where the user knows what the effect of using the substance will be and goes after it because he or she likes it. In this phase, people may experience some small negative consequences as a result of their use.

Examples of the first negative consequences are as follows:

- Hangovers
- Decline in grades
- Loss of trust of parents
- Embarrassment from behavior while using
- Getting sick
- Doing something you wish you hadn't done.
- Friends pulling away because they use.

Those who recognize the trouble as being related to the drinking or drugging will moderate or eliminate their use to insure that there are no more negative consequences. Once a person has experienced this sort of trouble, those who are going to "turn it around" will make a conscious decision to avoid the same level of chemical use to avoid a repeat of the trouble. For example, a student drinks five beers at a party, gets into a fight with his girlfriend, and gets grounded when his parents find out about his use. A healthy response to this situation would be to moderate or eliminate the use, the rationale being, "Last time I drank five beers, all sorts of terrible things happened." Next time, the adolescent drinks he/she will drink significantly less (or none at all) to avoid the negative consequences.

Others, who are in trouble with chemicals (but don't necessarily think they are) and who cannot make the connection between the negative consequence and their drug use, are already experiencing denial in its earliest form. They will endeavor to manipulate the surrounding circumstances (rather than moderate or eliminate the use) in an effort to use the same way but not have the associated trouble. They will continue to minimize the level of trouble as being small. No consequence related to alcohol or other drug use can be considered "small." These are the negative consequences which may seem less devastating at the outset but could nevertheless be indicative of trouble ahead and abuse despite negative consequences.

Using the preceding example, instead of moderating or eliminating the use, the adolescent will drink the same amount (or more) but make sure his girlfriend isn't at the party (or he'll get another girlfriend who doesn't mind his drinking) and he'll make sure his parents don't catch him this time, In his mind, full of denial, the problem has become the girlfriend and the parents, not his use of chemicals.

PHASE 3. Trouble: Although these people have experienced negative consequences due to their use, they continue to use. This phase is when denial becomes strong. As the tolerance for the substance increases, they have to use more, which usually increases the seriousness of the consequences.

The following are examples of more trouble:

- Problems with family and friends-arguments, fights, hurting loved ones' feelings, neglecting non-using friends, etc.
- Emotional pain-guilt, shame, embarrassment, anger, depression, etc.
- Drug side effects-hangovers, memory loss, vomiting, loss of coordination,
- Inability to concentrate, lack of sleep
- Psychological problems-denial, conflicts In values, low self-esteem, low tolerance for frustration
- Other problems - drinking and driving, poor school performance, missing work, accidents, injury, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

At this point, people experience negative emotions because of their use (embarrassment, shame, guilt, anger, etc.) and cover the negative feelings with yet more use and more denial. The lying to self and to others continues. At each stage along the way the person using has the option of treatment but at this stage they clearly need it.

PHASE 4. More Trouble: The negative consequences of the previous phase become more apparent. (Your stereotypical addicts and alcoholics are all in this deadly phase.) The user in this phase continues to use despite overwhelming negative consequences. If untreated, this progressive disease ultimately leads to death. Treatment In this phase is absolutely crucial.

Rapid-Onset Addiction (Also known as the 5/15 Rule):

Dependency is a process, not an event. Someone who begins to use in adulthood has the potential to develop all the symptoms of addiction within 5-15 years. A person who begins a pattern of use in adolescence can experience the same progression in five to fifteen months, and the child who uses in preadolescence (ages nine to thirteen) can experience the same symptoms in five to fifteen weeks. This dispels the myth that "It can't happen to me. I've only been using for a year and a half!"