



Drug abuse: Marijuana and Alcohol

Four levels of drug use are easily identifiable: non-drug use, drug use, drug abuse, and drug dependency.

Non-drug users do not use drugs whatsoever. Drug users use drugs from time to time, typically in the company of others during recreational time. Drug abusers use drugs more readily, at times when sobriety is called for and in such a manner that other life functions or roles are either put at risk or are already compromised. Drug dependent persons use drugs very regularly to the point where there is a physiological dependency. Given physiological dependency, abrupt cessation of the drug results in physical symptoms ranging from agitation to depression to physical pain to death.

Many people regard marijuana and alcohol as innocuous substances when used recreationally from time to time. That is arguable. At the very least, no one became a drug abuser without first becoming a drug user.

Drug abuse is of greater concern however and is more than occasional recreational use. While it may be argued that occasional recreational use is not destructive, problems do develop for those whose more frequent use interferes with psychological, marital, family, social, academic or vocational life. Further, the threshold of drug abuse is readily identifiable when it occurs during non-recreational time; where intoxication overlaps with non-recreational activities; when use or the after-effects of use interfere with any activity. In addition, if drug use is frequently or always associated with recreational activities, then this rises to the level of abuse, as the user is remarkably limited in scope of other healthy recreational activities.

Common among those who reach criteria for drug abuse is the false belief that their consumption is reasonable and does no harm. These persons are apt to project blame for any consequence to their drug abuse on factors outside of themselves. In other words, the drug abuser offers many excuses that serve to cloud or at least minimize their abuse. Hence the student failing academically will tell tales of the

teacher who picks on him/her. The employee will blame the boss and sometimes one spouse will blame the other spouse. Where both spouses abuse drugs or when a person is immersed in a peer group where drug abuse is normalized, persons are apt to perceive a kind of moral support to enable or embolden a position that their drug abuse is reasonable. Each will use the other to legitimize their drug abuse and try to cause it to appear less than what it is.

Notwithstanding, persons abusing drugs will need to take personal responsibility at some point to facilitate ongoing sobriety and to correct for the consequences of their behaviour.

While there may be issues with the inter-relationships of the drug abuser, the challenge is to help the person understand how the problems either originate with him or herself and/or are exacerbated by the drug abuse. Either way, it is vital that the drug abuser be held accountable and not avoid responsibility for the impact of their behaviour on self and others.

In addition to being held accountable for the outcome of their drug abuse, these persons will need support to engage in other healthy, pro-social activities that are incompatible with drug use.

Drug abuse is intensified when the person literally gets away with it, conceals it, is not held accountable and is able to talk their way or manipulate their way out of consequences and accountability.

When structures are put in place to limit opportunity for all drug use, the person is held accountable and other supports and activities are deployed, then recovery can occur and a healthier lifestyle adopted.

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