

# Addiction Questions and Answers

## **Is drug addiction/alcoholism a choice?**

It is a choice to try a drug or alcohol, but addiction itself is not a choice. It is a disease.

## **Why is addiction considered to be a disease?**

Addiction is considered a disease because it has the characteristics of every disease. It has a cause or beginning, creates known symptoms (physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual), has a predictable course, and can cause worsening illness to death. As with many diseases, addiction can be controlled/treated successfully.

## **What kind of disease is addiction?**

It is a chronic, potentially life-threatening disease that affects the individual physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This disease creates an "obsession" with the drug of choice and the "compulsion" to use it, regardless of the known consequences.

## **Can you explain the "physical" disease component of addiction?**

It is a complicated process that sets up changes in the user's brain chemistry, which ultimately affect his/her body functions, personality traits, judgment, and moral capacity.

## **Why doesn't the addict just quit? "Look at the mess his life is. If he loved me, he would."**

The disease of addiction is cunning, baffling, and powerful. It creates an overwhelming obsession with the drug and a driving compulsion to use it. Once addicted, the addict has little choice but to use. Substance abuse does not indicate a lack of love and affection for loved ones, but addicts' inability to control their use is a symptom of their disease.

## **Does everyone who uses drugs or drinks alcohol become an addict?**

No, not everyone becomes an addict. Some individuals who abuse drugs and alcohol do not become full-blown addicts in the disease sense. Often they may suffer many of the troubles that addicts do. No one knows if they will become addicts the first, second, or third time they use.

## **Why is addiction labeled as a "family disease?"**

Addiction affects everyone who has a relationship with the addict. The loved ones suffer from the addict's erratic behavior, try to control the addict's actions, and try to find ways to cure the addict. They become overcome by shame, fear, anger, anxiety, and a false sense of responsibility. They, ultimately, become as sick as the addict. They are addicted to the addict.

## **As a loved one, what did I do to cause her to become an addict?**

Nothing. The addict chose to experiment with drugs or alcohol. She did not choose to become an addict, and you certainly did not choose it for her. It just happened. No one wants to grow up to be a drug addict or alcoholic.

## **What can I do to make her stop using drugs or alcohol?**

Nothing. She has chosen to use drugs or alcohol and will continue until she chooses to remove the cause of this illness from her life. This will happen when the pain of addiction becomes worse than the pain of quitting.

## **What is enabling?**

Enabling is any behavior that removes or softens the consequences of addiction, thereby making it easier for the addict to continue to use drugs.

## **Why do addicts lie, cheat, steal, and break the law with no regard for those they victimize?**

Again, this is a symptom of the disease. The chemical changes in their brain drive them to do whatever it takes to satisfy their need for the drug. The changes affect their ability to resist wrongdoing, enable them to justify their behavior, and allow them to ignore any feeling of guilt for their actions. Essentially, nothing is off limits when trying to satisfy their need for a fix.

## **Is there anything we, as family, friends, or concerned citizens, can do about this issue of drug and alcohol addiction and the people who are addicted?**

We, as citizens, can educate ourselves about the disease of addiction. We can understand that addicts are someone's parents, children, siblings, spouses, or friends and are much loved. We can support agencies of professionals who work hard to help addicts in their recovery. We can support 12-Step Programs such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Friends and family members can seek help through organizations such as Nar-Anon and Ala-Anon to learn more about addiction and how to live with and around their addicted loved ones. They can learn to detach with love, to set acceptable boundaries, and to support addicts only in their walk to recovery, without enabling. And, finally, they can learn to take care of themselves first and give the rest to their Higher Power to handle.



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