

Substance Abuse & Families

Drug abuse is not an act of “isolation”! Drug and alcohol abuse not only affects the abuser and his/her life, but also the lives of family members, friends and neighbors. When a family member enters recovery, the whole family should be involved whenever and wherever possible. I would always recommend that “Family” therapy is an option that increases the odds for successful completion of treatment goals.

Family Problems

As I have said, drug and alcohol abuse not only affects you, but also your family, friends and neighbors. Addictions often create interpersonal problems that continue to cause problems for years to come.

- 1) *Jealousy*: You can grow jealous of your friends, your partner, other family members and other people in your life. The causes are too many to mention, but the dysfunctional behavior is a breeding ground for more issues to come.
- 2) *Conflict with Partner*: The intensity and occurrence of explosive arguments can become unmanageable. Many people use the “silent treatment” as a passive tool to maintain control of those around them. Yet this is an act of anger.
- 3) *Conflict with Children*: The challenges of parenthood are difficult enough without the mood swings associated with drug abuse. Worse of all you increase odds of your children being emotionally marred by your temper tantrums.
- 4) *Conflict over Money*: Drug abuse costs money - Lots of money! It is no wonder why so many of my clients are financially destitute. Their arguments intensify and as money becomes a problem of survival. Making poor financial choices or simply pouring your money into your addiction makes things worse.
- 5) *Emotional Trauma*: You may create emotional hardships for your partner and/or your children by yelling, talking down, insulting or manipulating.
- 6) *Violence*: My records show that over 70% of all family violence has some substance abuse involved. You may become violent or your family members may become violent with you. And let's not forget the emotional hurt that comes with the personal violation of being hit by someone you love.
- 7) *Cheating*: Too many times I see individuals seeking satisfaction from other partners. The “new” partner has not been through the trauma of your addiction, and all too often the drug abusing individual has multiple “bad” relationships. I have also seen too many drug abusers seeking satisfaction through pornography, Internet sex, prostitution or someone else in that “understands” you.
- 8) *Separation*: When the pressure becomes too much the only option is “separation”. Making up and breaking up can become a pattern that is a “black hole” of destruction. Many people divorce because the “black book” memories are too much to live with..
- 9) *Patterns*: Once a “pattern” is in place it is difficult to change. Unfortunately children observe patterns of drug abuse and sometimes repeat them in ways that cause them future problems. There is a high likelihood that your children will become addicted to drugs or alcohol if they observed you doing them and believe it is okay.
- 10) *Health Risks*: Drug abuse will destroy your body and impact your health. You will not live to your maximum potential if you introduce harmful drugs into your body regularly. Drinking while pregnant can cause fetal alcohol syndrome -- damage to the baby's brain. Smoking in the

household can cause health problems for family members from secondhand smoke, including lung cancer. Being under the influence of drugs and alcohol will overall impair your judgment and can lead to neglect or harm.

Family Structures

Drug and alcohol abuse affects different family structures in different ways. These family structures are adapted from The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services "Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy" guide:

- *If you live alone or with a partner:* Both of you need help. Many times I see one partner get help yet because they do not address their co-dependence they allow the partner to maintain their addiction or even get worse.
- *If you live with young children:* Simply stated parents' drug problems are likely to affect children. My experience has shown that children are more likely to abuse drugs when they witness their parent (s) do so. Kick the habit for yourself and for them!
- *If you have a step-family:* Substance abuse impedes your step-family's integration and stability. Your goals include being accepted as a "parental" figure. This means you have to own up to what you are doing, and what your step-children are witnessing.
- *If you are older and have grown children:* Drug abuse treatment is not cheap. It costs money – money that most people cannot afford. Yet if your addictions has gotten that far then you have no choice. Get help. Find a way!
- *If you are younger and live with your family:* The needs and concerns of siblings or other family members sometimes gets lost in the busy schedules of a large family. Also many times there are family crisis that bring distractions and deviations that hide that the problem even exists. When there are active substance abuse addictions the danger of physical and/or emotional conflicts rise dramatically.

Family Therapy

According to the "Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy" guide, family therapy is a good resource for recovery for family members with drug and alcohol addictions.

How can family therapy help me?

- Your family's strengths and resources can help you find ways to live without alcohol and drug addiction.
- You and your family will be better able to deal with the impact of detoxification, the process of cleansing your body from an addiction.
- Your family will become more aware of their own needs and feel that they can express their needs safely.
- The next generation in your family will be less likely to carry on your addiction.
- If you have lost custody of your children, you will be better able to overcome your addiction and reconnect with your family.

What should I know about family therapy?

- Make sure you find the right therapist or counselor and that you're upfront about why your family is going to therapy. Family therapists often don't screen for substance abuse, while substance abuse counselors need proper training and licensing to practice family therapy.
- If there is any physical or emotional abuse in the family, family counseling techniques are not an option, because family members must be protected.

