

# Solutions

ISSUE 11

FAMILY SERVICES EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

## ALCOHOLISM: THE DISEASE OF DENIAL

No one chooses to be an alcoholic. Alcoholism is a disease. In their hearts, most alcoholics know they are in the grips of a powerful addiction, yet they feel helpless to combat it. This inability to control the disease often leads to denial that the disease exists—not only on the part of the alcoholic, but by those who care for the alcoholic most.

### Self Denial

Although alcoholism is now known to be a disease, many people still hold the incorrect view that it is a behavioural problem. This widespread misconception may cause the alcoholic to feel guilt and embarrassment about their problem, which can contribute to self denial. Many persons who suffer from alcoholism exhibit similar behaviours—concealing the amount they drink, hiding bottles, drinking alone, and so on. Yet, when confronted with their drinking

“problem” they are apt to deny it altogether or make excuses for their behaviour. While they deny their problem to others, their very actions indicate their own awareness of their addiction.

### Co-Denial

Clergy, doctors, lawyers, social workers, family and friends are valuable resources for the alcoholic. Yet, in some cases these people unwittingly assist the alcoholic by covering up for him and denying that he must correct his own mistakes. When people make excuses for the alcoholic, that alcoholic is conditioned into believing there will always be a “protector” who will come to his or her rescue.

### Denying Dependence

As the disease progresses, the need to deny dependence becomes greater. The alcoholic may refuse to acknowledge that anyone has helped him. He may deny that his behaviour is causing family trouble. The real problem is that the alcoholic is well aware of the truth. The sense of guilt and remorse often becomes intolerable and the alcoholic’s helplessness in controlling his disease may be embarrassing to him.

### Initiating Recovery

If someone you care for has a drinking problem, contact your EAP immediately. A counsellor with experience treating alcoholics and their families can help all of you—the alcoholic and his or her loved ones—to help yourselves.

Adapted from: Alcoholism: The Disease of Denial © 1987 Parlay International, San Francisco CA USA

# THE STAGES OF ALCOHOLISM

The disease of alcoholism often moves in a predictable way. If you recognize any of these warning signs in yourself or those you care for, it may be time to seek professional help.

## WARNING STAGE

- Drinks too much to feel good.
- Drinks to get rid of stress.
- Goes from an occasional drink to daily drinks.
- Finds reasons to have a drink.
- Drinks more each time.
- Gets used to more alcohol in the body.

## DANGER STAGE

- Wants more alcohol.
- Becomes drunk more often.
- Blacks out occasionally; can't remember what happened.
- Drinks alone.
- Sneaks drinks.
- Gulps drinks.
- Feels guilty about drinking.
- Misses work (or school).

## LOSING CONTROL STAGE

- Blames others for needing a drink.
- Withdraws, rejects other people and shuts them out.
- Gets drunk often.
- Blacks out often.
- Spends money recklessly.
- Ignores responsibilities.
- Needs occasional hospitalization because of drinking.

## LOSS OF CONTROL STAGE

- Takes any kind of drug.
- Stops making excuses.
- Gets comfort from being drunk.
- Shakes.
- Fails at simple tasks.

## Did You Know?

Alcohol may have wide-ranging and long-term effects on the body.

- Loss of memory and mental powers.
  - Increased risk of heart attacks.
  - Damage to the heart muscle.
  - Stomach irritation and ulcers.
    - Liver cancer.
  - Raised blood pressure.
  - Cirrhosis of the liver.
    - Overweight.
- Increased sexual desire but reduced performance.

Source: Drug Safety for young people © 1993 Gateway Publishing Company, Winnipeg MB

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