

# DRUG ABUSE

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:  
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

## **Description**

Common drugs abused include: marijuana, cocaine, heroin, meth-amphetamine, and prescription drugs, such as Percocet, Oxycodone, Xanax, and stimulants such as Adderall or Concerta. Many drugs have become more potent over time. Marijuana in the 60's and 70's had THC potency of about 1% on average, where today the potency averages 17%, making it much more addictive. Meth use has become more prevalent with rates up as much as 100-250% and in some Midwest areas accounting for as much as 90% of criminal drug cases. Just like with alcohol there are four levels of drug use: abstinence, social use, abuse, and dependence. There is no social use of drugs. All drugs result in euphoric experiences at certain thresholds and are not used for the taste. It can be difficult to differentiate between those who abuse and those who have crossed the line to dependence. The symptoms below will detail the differences.

## **Symptoms & Features**

Drug abuse and dependence have the same symptoms as alcohol abuse/dependence. Drug abuse is problematic use leading to impaired functioning or consequences in one of the following life areas: 1) work, school, or home, 2) continued use in physically hazardous situations, 3) drug use resulting in legal problems, 4) continued use despite recurrent social or interpersonal problems. Drug dependence is a problematic pattern of use resulting in 3 of the following 7 symptoms in a 12 month period of time: 1) tolerance (a need for an increase in the amount of the drug to get the same desired effect), 2) withdrawal (shakes, sweats, etc. in the absence of use, 3) using in larger amounts or over longer time than intended, 4) a persistent desire to cut down, control, or quit, 5) great deal of time spent in obtaining drugs or recovering from its effects, 6) important social, occupational, and recreational activities are reduced or given up for drugs, 7) using despite physical/medical problems that may be worsened by drug use.

## **Treatment**

Drug abuse is often intervened upon with educational programs intended to deter and reduce use before abuse develops into dependence. Random urine drug testing by employers can also be a deterrent for many people, especially for marijuana use given its long half-life. Drug dependence is typically treated with abstinence based treatment programs. Sometimes detoxification is required in the case of withdrawal symptoms to prevent serious complications such as seizures, heart attacks, or extreme discomfort. Then people are either directed to in-patient (28 days typically) or out-patient (60 hours occurring 3-4X weekly for 4-5 weeks) chemical dependency programs. Treatment occurs in a group therapy format with focus on breaking through denial of one's problem, education around the disease of addiction, and providing people with tools to remain abstinent.

## **What Can I Do To Help Myself**

If you think you may have a drug problem, you should get an assessment by a specialist at I.P.C. who performs chemical dependency evaluations. Know your family history of addiction, because you are 4-5X more likely to develop dependence if it runs in your family. If you have not been able to stop or stick to limits, this should be a clear indication that you may have serious problems and need an assessment. In addition, you can read about drug abuse, its effects, and its treatment. You can also check out community resources such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Cocaine Anonymous (CA), or other 12 step programs for assistance in remaining sober.