

Chapter 1

Answering the Question:
**Am I Addicted to Alcohol and
Other Drugs?**

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*When we long for life without difficulties,
remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds
and diamonds are made under pressure.*

-Peter Marshall

Chemical dependency is a complex disease that is chronic, primary, progressive, oftentimes fatal, and prone to relapse. There are emotional, psychological, behavioral, physiological, cognitive, and spiritual aspects to the disease of chemical dependency. Just like any other disease, chemical dependency affects all people without discrimination—men and women, young and old, emotionally disturbed and mentally fit, rich, and poor.

Nobody initially consumes alcohol and other drugs with the idea of becoming an alcoholic or drug addict. Most people initially consume alcohol and other drugs to experiment or for social purposes. Sadly, some of those individuals who begin drinking and drugging for purposes of experimentation or social use at some point cross the line from experimentation and social use to abuse and eventually, dependency. Depending on the person, depending on the drug(s) consumed, depending on the frequency and quantity of the drug(s) consumed, depending on other variables such as genetics, height and weight, environmental conditions and co-existing emotional disorders some individuals may cross the line of social use sooner rather than later and others later rather than sooner.

How about you? Are you in danger of crossing the line? Have you already crossed the line? Or are you just curious at this point about yourself or someone else? It can be difficult to see in yourself whether or not you've crossed the line. You may have convinced yourself that you don't abuse alcohol and other drugs or that you're not chemically dependent because you're not like an alcoholic or a drug addict. After all, you go to work everyday, pay your bills, keep a roof over your head, are a well-liked

and respected member of your community and have no legal or financial problems.

So if you don't look like a drunk, act like a drunk or walk like a drunk, then how can you tell whether or not you're a drunk? There are some common signs and symptoms that can help you determine for yourself whether or not you've crossed the line from social use to abuse to dependency. Loss of control, denial, and preoccupation are but a few characteristics of chemical dependency.

Loss of control is one dynamic that distinguishes abuse of alcohol and other drugs from dependency on alcohol and other drugs. Chemical dependency means one thing and one thing only—your ability to *control* your consumption of alcohol and other drugs is impaired. Loss of control means:

- 1) When you consume alcohol and other drugs your behavior becomes unpredictable.
- 2) You promise yourself that you're going to quit but either can't, or else do so only for a short period of time before using again.
- 3) You can't stick to a previously determined amount of alcohol or other drugs you will consume.
- 4) You can't see the outcome when you start to consume alcohol and other drugs.
- 5) You find yourself consuming more and more alcohol and other drugs to get the same effect you use to get with a lesser amount.

A second characteristic of chemical dependency is *denial*. Denial is the tendency to make excuses, minimize, rationalize, intellectualize, blame others, or fail to acknowledge altogether the extent of your alcohol and other drugs use and the effect of your use on you and the

people in your life.

Denial prevents you from acknowledging the full extent of your involvement with alcohol and other drugs. Denial both protects you from the truth of what you're doing to your life and enables you to continue consuming alcohol and other drugs. At the same time, denial prevents you from looking at the seriousness of your alcohol and other drug use as well as the consequences of your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

These are a few examples of how denial manifests in your life:

- 1) You minimize the severity of your dependency on alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) You frequently attempt to control your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.
- 3) You ignore or fail to take ownership of the problems caused by your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.
- 4) You maintain secrets about yourself and your alcohol and other drugs use.
- 5) You lie to yourself and others about your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.
- 6) You blame others for your problems rather than taking ownership of them yourself.

A third characteristic of chemical dependency is *preoccupation*. Simply put, preoccupation refers to the obsessive focus that alcohol and other drugs takes up in your life. For chemically dependent individuals, more and more emotional, cognitive, and behavioral energies are spent in the anticipation of using, the planning of using, the act of using, and the concealment of using.

For chemically dependent individuals, the following

questions become the god of their existence. *How and when can I use next? How and where can I acquire the alcohol and other drugs that I'm going to consume? How and where can I get the money necessary to pay for the alcohol and other drugs I'm going to consume? How can I prevent the people in my life from discovering the extent of my alcohol and other drug consumption?*

If you recognize that you experience impaired or *loss of control* of your consumption of alcohol and other drugs, *preoccupation* with your acquiring, consuming, and hiding your consumption of alcohol and other drugs, and *denial* about your use and the impact your use has on you and the people in your life, you need to examine more openly and honestly your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.