

What is addiction?

Addiction means that a large part of a person's life is devoted to buying and taking drugs.

Addiction

Addiction usually applies to regular, heavy users of drugs such as heroin or cocaine but it could also involve other drugs or alcohol hence the term alcoholic. The term addiction and addict, however, conjure up all sorts of negative images of people and dehumanise those it is applied to. Some people even believe that addiction is a disease and that once people are addicts they will always be addicts, even though there is no real evidence to support this view. People can and do change throughout their life.

Saying somebody is drug dependent is better than calling them an addict - or worse -a junkie. Dependency is a strong compulsion to keep taking drugs.

Physical dependency

Physical dependency results from the repeated, heavy use of drugs like heroin, tranquillisers and alcohol. Heavy and continual use of these drugs can change the body chemistry so that if someone does not get a repeat dose they suffer physical withdrawal symptoms - the shakes, flu like effects. They have to keep taking the drug just to stop themselves from feeling ill.

Psychological dependency

Psychological dependency is more common and can happen with any drug. In this case people get into the drug experience as a way of coping with the world or as a way of feeling OK. They feel they could not cope without drugs even though they may not be physically dependent.

You can become psychologically dependent on just about anything - chocolate, gambling, playing computer games, sex, working out or even another person. If any activity becomes more important to you than everything else - school or college work, job, family or friends things may need to change.

Dependency will often include both physical and psychological factors. While the physical aspect will only be present with certain drugs, a psychological aspect will occur with any form of dependence. With certain drugs and particularly stimulant drugs such as cocaine, crack, amphetamine and the nicotine in cigarettes there is debate over the extent that physical dependence occurs.

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