

Become educated about drug addiction

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Every minute of every day, around the clock, five people try an illicit drug for the first time. That adds up to nearly three million people per year. Tragically, more than half of these initiates are under 18.

People using drugs go through several stages on their way to full-blown addiction:

Stage 1: They're curious about drug use; they may ask questions or ask to join those using drugs. They willingly listen to stories about the effects of drugs. They watch others obtaining drugs or using them.

Stage 2: They experiment with drugs and discover the effects. This is usually social, recreational use carried out as part of a group, usually on weekends. The peer pressure of the group use is enough reason for many people to continue to use drugs.

Stage 3: Now the drug user has discovered the "benefits" of using drugs. Perhaps they alleviate boredom or anxiety. Problems and stresses may seem to disappear. Girls or women may use stimulants for weight loss and males may use steroids for appearance enhancement. When the positive effects outweigh the risks or any negative effects, these individuals may become regular users. They acquire a supply of drugs and drug paraphernalia. They have regular contacts they can rely on for more supplies.

They may use drugs more frequently, no longer restricting their use to weekends. Their behavior and activities begin to change. School, work or family affairs may seem less important. They may change their friends to associate with others who use drugs. Legal complications may appear.

Stage 4: They now become preoccupied with drug use. Behavior changes become more pronounced and obvious. The user may be found to lie frequently and may begin stealing or dealing drugs to support drug use. As drug tolerance increases, the user may start using stronger drugs to get the same effect. More neglect of school, work or family affairs will show up. The user will become secretive, hard to reach and is likely to neglect former interests completely. Legal and financial complications often worsen.

Become educated about drug addiction

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Stage 5: At this point, the user is dependent on their drug of choice. He or she can't face daily life without drugs and uses them just to function or feel "normal." They deny the problem and present a completely false face to their family and environment.

Physical problems worsen. Financial and legal complications are often severe. They may sever ties with family and former friends. They are now addicted.

There are only three possible outcomes to addiction: early death, prison or sobriety.

Being an educated parent or family member is one of the best things one can do to prevent this progression toward addiction. When one suspects a family member is abusing drugs or alcohol, the right thing to do is to look for yourself, rather than believe everything you are told. The wrong thing to do is to hope that it's not that bad and will all go away on its own.

And when drug use has marched forward into addiction, what is needed is a drug rehabilitation program that addresses and eliminates the true causes of addiction.