

## Chemical Dependency has Many Characteristics

The last few newsletters have addressed parenting tips about [confronting your teen](#), [talking about alcohol and other drugs](#) and [showing you care by saying no](#). The majority of teens will respond to the limits and rules parents establish and subconsciously want those boundaries. [The majority of Districts' 203 & 204 high school students are making healthy choices and are drug-free](#). But what happens if a teen starts down the path of using drugs? We know postponing first use is critical because the earlier use begins, the more likely it can lead to addiction/chemical dependency. If a problem starts, continues or deteriorates, it is important to seek help. The [Parent Resource Page](#) can help to find local resources. So what are the characteristics of this disease?

### The Facts about Chemical Dependency

#### Chemical Dependency is characterized by denial.

- Chemically dependent people are often unable to see, or are unaware, that they have a problem... they trust a very faulty memory because of blackouts, repression or euphoric recall.
- The best way to help is to allow that person to experience the consequences of their use/behavior.
- It is extremely important not to enable. Enabling allows drug use to continue or progress. You are enabling the continued use of the drug if you are:
  - ◊ Doing something for someone who is capable of doing it for themselves.
  - ◊ Accepting inappropriate behavior as appropriate.
  - ◊ Taking responsibility for something that isn't your responsibility.

#### Chemical Dependency is progressive.

- It is guaranteed to get worse in a predictable fashion.
- The drug of choice drives the timeline to dependency but it happens much more quickly in adolescents. The earlier use/abuse starts the more likely it will lead to dependency or addiction.

#### Chemical Dependency is characterized by loss of control.

- The loss of ability to control use and what happens when they use progresses.
- The continued use in spite of negative consequences is a true indicator of loss of control.

#### Chemical Dependency is a multifaceted disorder.

- Chemically dependent people become physically, emotionally, and spiritually ill.
- Dependency is activated through abuse. Abuse typically comes about by precipitating factors such as depression, trauma or abuse, low self-esteem, etc. and these may require healing as well.

#### Chemical Dependency is a primary issue.

- A chemically dependent person may have other problems, but until the chemical dependency is arrested, attempts to deal with the other issues will be difficult.

#### Chemical Dependency is chronic.

- There is no cure but recovery can happen through abstinence.

#### Chemical Dependency is a family issue.

- Chemical dependency has a genetic component.
- As the dependent person becomes progressively ill, the family also becomes emotionally ill as they attempt to control, and then survive the problem through denial, continued attempts to control and second guessing themselves about what to do. Anger, frustration and guilt can lead to added stress among the family members.
- Individual family members are each affected differently by the using member and should also seek help to cope with the situation.
- No one outside of the chemically dependent person is powerful enough to Cause, Control, or Cure the disease.

#### Chemical Dependency is fatal.

- If untreated it will result in death through primary reasons (physiological damage to the body) or secondary reasons (accidents, overdoses, suicide, violence).

#### Two hard and fast rules regarding Chemical Dependency

- Intervention is a process, not an event. Setting limits and carrying out consequences is part of the process.
- The pain of the consequences of one's behavior is a great motivator of change.

Addiction exerts a long and powerful influence on the brain that manifests in three distinct ways: craving for the object of addiction, loss of control over its use, and continuing involvement with it despite adverse consequences. Find additional information about understanding addiction: ["How Addiction Hijacks the Brain"](#) from [HelpGuide.org](#)

Having the knowledge, resources and support can help if you and your family are faced with this difficult situation. Seek the help you need. [The Parent Resource Page](#) can help you find local resources.

Watch for April's newsletter:  
Being a positive role model



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