



kort's korner

Making Addictions Crystal Clear

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL ARE PART of our American culture. Their use is rampant among gay men, since the bars are a main social outlet. The anxiety of walking into a gay bar and hoping to meet Mr. Right, or even make friends,

can be excruciating. Alcohol and drugs can help to ease that anxiety. Crystal meth has been in the gay community for a while and has hit Michigan big over the past year. If I can speak in my Jewish Mother voice I would say that any use of crystal meth is going too far. But in my professional understanding of the gay culture, I know the reality is that gay men use it. So, how much use is going too far?

Clients often ask me what level of drug or alcohol use points to an addiction, compared to mere recreational social use. Is it an addiction to use crystal meth only on the weekends? Is it recreational to drink until I get drunk—once a week? If I use drugs or alcohol only to socialize, does that make me an abuser?

People often believe they're not addicted if they don't crave the drug or alcohol, or if they're not suffering withdrawal symptoms when they try to quit. They don't realize that those symptoms affect only a

small percentage of users at the later stages of severe addiction. Most people with drug and alcohol problems, even some chronic alcoholics and drug abusers, do not experience cravings or withdrawal symptoms.

Based on the Chemical Dependency model, there are three general types of drug and alcohol users—Recreational, Abusive, and Addictive, based on the following criteria:

Recreational Users

Recreational Users drink or use drugs only on “special occasions.” These individuals can control their use and can start and stop whenever they choose. They can predict in advance how much they will drink or use and seldom suffer any negative consequences. They never get ticketed for driving under the influence (DUI) and don't experience blackouts.

(Blackouts are different from passing out. A blackout is any period of

time, whether it be five minutes to five hours, that you cannot recall, no matter how much you try. You can't remember what others report you said and did while under the influence.)

Drug or alcohol use doesn't interfere with their lives in any way. It simply enhances their social lives and is used in good fun.

Abusive Users

Abusive Users also drink or use drugs recreationally, can control their intake, and can start and stop when they choose. For the most part, they can predict how much they will consume. But at times, these individuals' use is out of control. They cannot predict the results and suffer negative consequences such as DUI citations (or if not given a ticket, being stopped for poor driving), blackouts, verbal and physical fights with family, friends or partners, and risking sexually transmitted diseases—to name a few.

But abusers will take these negative consequences as a wake-up call. To avoid the negative consequences, they either reduce their intake permanently or stop altogether. They may experience one or two further negative experiences

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from their abusive use of drugs or alcohol, decide never to indulge to that degree again—and they don't. They take responsibility and are accountable for the consequences of their own use and resolve them immediately.

Addictive Users

Addictive Users drink or use drugs recreationally too, but aren't in control. When they experience a negative consequence they might stop for a while but not for long. Ultimately they return to their former amount and frequency and may even use more over time. They cannot predict how much they use or how often they use it and their negative consequences become abundant. The definition of addiction is any behavior or activity that interferes with your life in some way, but which you continue to do despite the negative consequences.

Unlike the abuser, the addict suffers many more negative consequences such as blackouts, DUI's, and risks STD's. Typically they will blame others for their own mishaps, complaining that "Michigan's driving laws are too strict," or "My friends and family complain too much." They often truly believe their own excuses and will say, "I can stop whenever I want. I just don't want to."

If you've been experiencing loss of control, failed in your attempts to stop or cut down, increased your tolerance whereby you're using more

to achieve the same high as before, and continue to use in spite of negative consequences, then you have an addiction. I highly recommend you seek professional help immediately or attend an AA or NA meeting. For more information on where to find these groups call Affirmations at 248-398-7105. For more information on Crystal Meth go to www.tweaker.org.