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ADDICTION and DENIAL

Contributed by Bruce Pemberton

Addiction

Addiction assumes many symptoms, for example, a person can be addicted to alcohol, drugs, food, work, gambling or sex. It affects not only the addict, but entire families, friends, loved ones, and associates. It is important to remember that addiction is a progressive illness, and when left untreated, will lead to an unmanageable life. The earlier it is recognized and treated, the more likely the recovering addict will have a rewarding life and good health. All too often, addicts come in for treatment after they hit rock bottom, making it more difficult and a longer recovery process. Any hope for a quality life is put on hold until they work through major issues.

Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that prevents a person from consciously becoming aware of a problem. As a person's alcohol and drug use advances from experimentation to addiction, denial of resulting problems can also advance and drift more and more to the unconscious level. Not only has the addict experienced this denial, but also their families, friends, and co-workers. Denial delays the recognition and acceptance of a chemical dependency problem. It is a refusal to admit the negative impact that the addiction is having on a person's life.

How Does Denial Manifest Itself?

- Thinking that putting down the drink is enough. "I know I use too much, but I just have to reduce my habit".
- Looking at what has not yet happened and priding yourself in that. "I never went to jail, or got arrested". "He is worse than me as far as I'm concerned, cuz he's a drug addict".
- Thinking that alcoholics are only skid row bums.
- Believing that you stop on your own because you may have been able to quit for brief periods in the past.
- Forgetting how painful the last drunk or bad trip was.
- Knowing that you have the symptoms of addiction but continue to make excuses for these symptoms. "Well, I used the wine to calm my nerves when I was upset".
- Rationalize: use logical statements to give socially acceptable reasons to protect self-esteem. "Just drinking to calm me down after work".
- Taking suppressed feelings out on another. "If the kids weren't screaming all the time and this place wasn't such a mess, I wouldn't have to drink".
- Intellectually: admitting that you're an alcoholic but unable to accept it on a gut level.

Breaking Through Denial:

- Learn the difference between your sober thinking and your thinking when you are under the influence of a drug.
- Stop trying to take control or make excuses for your inappropriate behavior due to the use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Ask for help by recognizing your dependence on alcohol and other drugs.
- Be open-minded about addiction, consciously telling yourself that you are a good person who happens to be addicted and you are in recovery.
- Attend AA/NA meetings and other self-help support groups regularly.
- Surround yourself with sober people, and people who care about you.
- Poor performance at work and fear of losing your job may break through denial. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) can assist with the at-risk worker. Take advantage of this resource.
- If you have health problems, see your doctor, and be honest. Your health is at risk here and your doctor needs to know all the facts of your history to help you.

Substance and Alcohol Intervention Services for the Deaf (SAISD)