

**Interviewer:**

You mentioned a term, I believe it was “abuse pattern”. What do you mean by that?

**Robert:**

There are many ways that people use alcohol and drugs and these using behaviors are referred to as “patterns of use”. Also, various terms such as “use”, “abuse”, or “addiction” are often used interchangeably to describe problem behavior. For instance, an addict may be called a “user”. This just confuses the issues. The terms “use”, “abuse”, and “addiction” have very different definitions and are not clinically interchangeable. The different definitions fall on a continuum starting with use moving to abuse and ending with addiction. Clearly, not everyone who uses alcohol is an alcoholic and we are not saying so. But using alcohol while on the job is not allowed. If people use while on the job, they are very likely to be abusing or addicted.

**Interviewer:**

So when does problem use really start?

**Robert:**

Problems generally start when people move from “use” into “abuse”.

Many people consider themselves “social users”. However, if a person has problems at home, legally, or on the job because of alcohol and/or drug use, that person is really considered an “abuser” even if such use is only occasional.

**Interviewer:**

So it sounds as if abuse is more serious than use?

**Robert:**

Yes. Abuse is much more serious than use. First, abuse is more likely to lead to accidents and injuries. Remember, the focus of the policy is safety. Even more serious, abuse can also lead to blackouts. Blackouts are not when people pass out. Blackouts occur when the person's body keeps on going, keeps on walking, keeps on talking, keeps on driving, et cetera but the person's mind is unable to remember what happened. The person's coordination, their judgment and their reaction times are all very impaired and this could result in stumbling, falling, and other things which can lead to accidents.

Blackouts often lead to legal problems, especially when a person drives, gets arrested, and loses their license. This becomes a challenging situation for people.

**Interviewer:**

What else can happen?

**Robert:**

People who are in the abuse level of use for alcohol or other drugs often begin having performance issues at work. Patterns of behavior emerge. They can come in late on Mondays and/or leave early on Fridays. They call off work more often. Frequently, they take extended lunches. Finally, if they abuse alcohol and drugs for a long period of time or a heavy quantity for a short period time, they can begin to have health problems as a result.

**Interviewer:**

At what point does a person move from "abuse" to "addiction"?

**Robert:**

Prolonged use or abuse can lead to addiction.

Addiction is characterized by the repeated, compulsive search for or use of a substance (such as a drug or alcohol) despite the adverse social, psychological, and/or physical consequences. For some individuals, occasional use can lead to abuse which can eventually lead to addiction. Again, I want to stress that not everyone that uses alcohol or drugs will become addicted.

For someone addicted to alcohol or drugs, the search for that drug or for alcohol consumes their whole life and becomes their entire focus. Many people say they could never become addicted to alcohol or drugs but, in some ways, this becomes more understandable if we look at those things that all people must have to stay alive. Taking the next breath for a normal individual is just as important to that individual as taking the next drink, pill, shot or puff is to the addicted person.

**Interviewer:**

What are some of the possible consequences of addiction?

**Robert:**

Addiction is chronic. It's progressive. It's primary. It can eventually lead to death. By primary, I'm talking about the fact that it is the cause of problems, not the result. People often make excuses for others who drink or use drugs— for instance you might hear someone say "If I had his problems, I would drink too". Unfortunately, it's the other way around. The drinking or drug use is probably a huge part of what makes the person's life miserable.

**Interviewer:**

This sounds like a real challenge to people. What can you do?

**Robert:**

Helping an addict get professional services to address their addiction is the best thing that you can do for them. You can take a first step towards giving them back their life.

Since abuse and addiction are progressive, it's good to know what to watch out for so it can be recognized and interrupt the cycle early if possible. By actually talking to a person you believe has a drug or alcohol problem and telling them you believe they have a problem, you're doing them a favor. People tend to ignore the problem and won't do anything about it or they pretend and hope the problem is going to go away. But because addiction is progressive, the longer we ignore it, the worse it can get.