

# ALCOHOLISM

## OVERVIEW

The United States Commerce Department reports that the average American drinks 22.4 gallons of beer, 1.85 gallons of wine, and 2 gallons of hard liquor each year. A total of \$12.4 billion is spent on alcoholic beverages annually. The following statistics highlight some of the problems of alcohol abuse:

- \* Twenty-five percent of all American teenagers who drink alcoholic beverages have serious alcohol problems.
- \* An alcoholic high once a week can produce an alcoholic in one or two years.
- \* Seventy percent of teenage highway accidents are alcohol-related.
- \* Eighty-five percent of teenage suicides are identified with alcohol abuse.
- \* Seventy percent of parents never converse with their children about alcohol abuse.
- \* Alcohol abuse costs the United States an estimated \$45 billion annually.
- \* Alcoholism is the third greatest health problem and cause of death in the United States, exceeded only by heart disease and cancer.
- \* There are an estimated eleven million alcoholics in this country. One out of ten drinkers is an alcoholic and one out of five heavy drinkers is an alcoholic.
- \* Twelve percent of all family problems involve alcoholism.

A 1974 study found that

- \* One-third of all teenagers get drunk once a month.
- \* Five percent of all teenagers get drunk once a week.
- \* One and one half million teenagers have a serious drinking problem.
- \* Sixty percent of all traffic fatalities are due to teenage drunkenness.
- \* Fifty percent of all traffic fatalities are due to drunken driving.
- \* Thirty percent of teens do not drink.
- \* Fifty percent of teens drink only occasionally.

A 1978 study found that

- \* There are 3,300,000 thirteen to seventeen year-olds who have serious alcohol problems.
- \* One-third of drinking teens drink more than they should.

\* Alcohol is a factor in one-third of all suicides and half of all violent crimes, teenage traffic fatalities, and fatal house fires.

Therapists find that adult children of problem drinkers or alcoholics may suffer from the strain of supporting a family that appeared to be in good shape but was not. Maintenance of such a family system without expressing feelings that might upset other family members can produce great inner discomfort in an outwardly successful adult life. Hidden resentment and defensiveness can mar relationships and rob one of inner peace.

Project 714 of Chattanooga suggest these as signs of alcoholism:

#### I. Growing Preoccupation.

##### A. Anticipation of Drinking.

1. During daytime activities.
2. Vacation times (fishing trips, beach parties, sporting events can become drinking binges).
3. Growing involvement in drinking activities.

##### B. Growing Need During Times of Stress.

1. On the job.
2. Family, marriage, or relationship problems.
3. Emergencies.

#### II. Growing Rigidity of Lifestyle.

- A. Particular times for drinking during the day established.
- B. Self-imposed limits beginning to change.
- C. Will not tolerate interference during drinking times.
- D. Limits "social" activities to those which involve drinks.

#### III. Growing Tolerance.

- A. "Wooden Leg" syndrome—ability to hold liquor without showing it.
- B. Ingenuity in obtaining alcohol without others knowing.
- C. Tendency to:
  1. Gulp drinks and sneak drinks.
  2. Order "stiffer" drinks.
  3. Be self-appointed bartender at parties.

4. Purchase liquor in greater quantities.
5. Hide and protect supply and empties.

#### IV. Loss of Control.

- A. Unplanned drinking.
- B. Binge drinking—even alone.
- C. Morning drinking.
- D. Repeated harmful effects from alcohol.
- E. Increasing blackouts.

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

1. With kids hurried through childhood in a highly competitive society which advocates and models alcohol and drug use, it is not surprising that alcohol is a prime problem, and killer among youth.
2. Parents, teachers, counselors, and youth leaders need to work together in supporting the kind of growth that reduces alcohol abuse.
3. Those working with youth need to know the warning signs and specific trends of alcoholism. As youth leaders are more aware, they can help alcoholics accept their state and seek counseling.
4. Young people themselves, as they take part in positive and supportive peer groups, can be a vital source of instruction and confrontation with one another, and a source of information for concerned adults.

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