

Identifying an alcohol problem

Most people use alcohol socially with little or no negative side effects. It can enhance their relaxation. However, many are drinking too much and they may be unaware of the subtle negative effects it is having on their lives. When heavy drinking leads to health, work, or relationship problems, it is problem drinking which needs attention.

Honestly accurately assessing one's drinking is the first step to addressing the problem.

Identifying problem drinking does not necessarily mean having to stop drinking for good. But it does mean taking action to rectify the issue. Details of help options are printed at the rear of this leaflet.

If any of the following points ring true it would be wise to examining how it is affecting your life and family and take action to rectify it.

- ❖ Family or social problems associated with drinking.
- ❖ Preoccupation with drinking.
- ❖ Marked changes in behaviour or personality when drinking.
- ❖ Lying about amounts of alcohol taken or hiding the fact at all.
- ❖ Making promises about drinking to oneself or others ("to cut down on drinking," "to be more careful," etc.). But failing to carry them through.
- ❖ Drinking to escape from pressure or to solve life's problems and calm oneself.
- ❖ Feeling guilty after drinking or regret over what was done while drinking.
- ❖ Getting drunk even when intending to stay sober.
- ❖ Drinking capacity, once big, is now dropping (later indication of problem drinking).
- ❖ Experiencing "Blackouts"—(not recalling the drinking episode or details of what happened.)
- ❖ Inability to keep commitments, and carry out duties.
- ❖ Financial problems as a result of drinking.
- ❖ Getting drunk frequently.
- ❖ Gulping drinks and drinking more than those in the social setting.
- ❖ Drinking alone.
- ❖ Academic or job difficulties related to drinking.
- ❖ Experiencing alcohol related incidences with the law.
- ❖ Drinking being criticised by people who care or being directly requested that it be cut down.

Continuing problem drinking will lead to increased lifestyle difficulties for the drinker and their loved ones.

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Unwittingly helping someone to continue problem drinking.

Enabling is doing for someone things that they could, and should be doing themselves.

Enabling creates an atmosphere in which the problem drinker can comfortably continue their unacceptable behaviour.

Here are a few points which determine the amount of unwitting enabling one may be involved in:

- ❖ Calling in "sick" for a drinker, covering up and lying about their symptoms.
- ❖ Accepted part of the blame for another persons drinking or resultant embarrassing behaviour.
- ❖ Making excuses for the drinkers behaviour.
- ❖ Fear of the response if confronting the drinker about their drinking.
- ❖ Bailing the drinker out of Garda custody or paying for their legal fees.
- ❖ Paying bills that the drinker was supposed to have paid themselves.
- ❖ Regularly funding the drinkers drinking.
- ❖ Joining them in drinking hoping to strengthen the relationship or control their intake.
- ❖ Constantly giving the drinker "one more chance".
- ❖ Threatening to abandon them and not carrying it through.
- ❖ Covering up for the drinker in social and professional areas hiding the true extent of their drinking.
- ❖ The problem drinking is kept a secret within the family

If these points ring true it is important that you look at your unwitting part in the problem. Problem drinkers tend to avoid their own responsibilities. By covering up you have probably become a major contributor to the growing and continuing problem and chances are have become psychologically effected by the problem drinker yourself.

As long as the problem drinker has their enabling devices in place, it is easy for them to continue to deny the problem. Most of the problems are being "solved" by those around them. Only when forced to face the consequences of their own actions, will it finally begin to sink in how deep the problem really is.

Rather than "helping" the problem drinker, you may actually be making it easier for them to get worse.

However, it's not your fault and remember you're not alone

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HELP FOR PROBLEM DRINKING.

“Problem drinking is a pattern of drinking in which a person has lost control over their drinking so that it is interfering with some vital area of their life such as family, friends, job, school, health or other such area important for them.”

- ❖ Begin by talking to a trusted family member or friend. The support of a counsellor or other person who understands alcohol problems could make all the difference.
- ❖ Find out about Alcohol Counselling Services in your area by speaking to your GP, or by contacting the following numbers:
 - ❖ HSE INFORMATION LINE 1850 241 850
 - ❖ National Counselling Service 1800 235 235
 - ❖ Homeless Service 1800 724 724
 - ❖ AA out of hours service 1890 412 412

Some HSE local health offices for further information:

Cork South: 021-492383 Cork North: 021-4923954
Dublin North West: 01-8693504 Dublin North Central: 01-8467341 Dublin North:
01-8131867 Dublin South East: 01-2680506 Dublin South West: 01-4632800
Dublin South City: 01-4085100 Dublin West: 01-6206276
Galway: 091-775553 Limerick: 061-483277 Meath: 046-9280567 Longford /
Westmeath: 044-9395505

- ❖ Community-based counselling services offering weekly individual counselling sessions. Some also offer group support.
- ❖ Rehabilitation centres offering residential treatment (30 - 60 days, depending on the centre);
- ❖ Self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous are countrywide and an excellent means of ongoing group support.
- ❖ Al-anon provides for families and friends of problem drinkers countrywide and is an excellent means of ongoing group support.
 - ❖ Self-help groups are usually free of charge.
- ❖ Community-based counselling services are usually free if provided by the HSE or voluntary agency, while private counsellors charge an hourly rate. Rehabilitation centres set their own fee. Most offer flexible payment methods to accommodate people of different means.
- ❖ Many Health Centres provide some part-or fully-funded places for such centres. Enquire with the Administrator of the centre about funding options.

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