

Can I Handle Alcohol/Drugs?

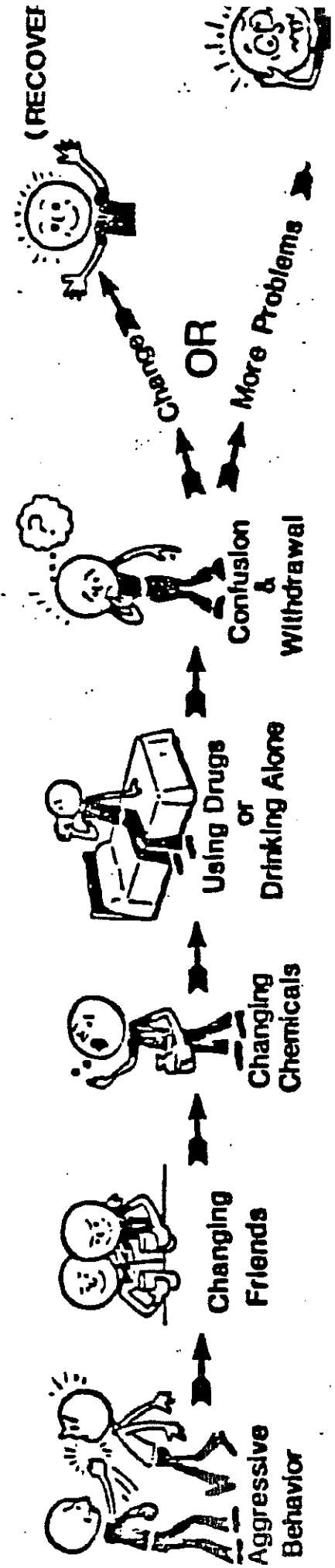
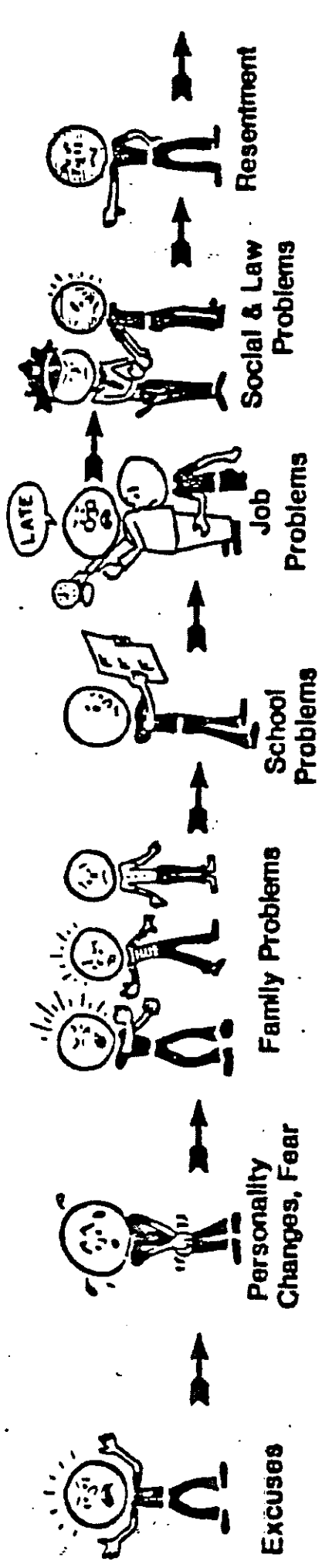
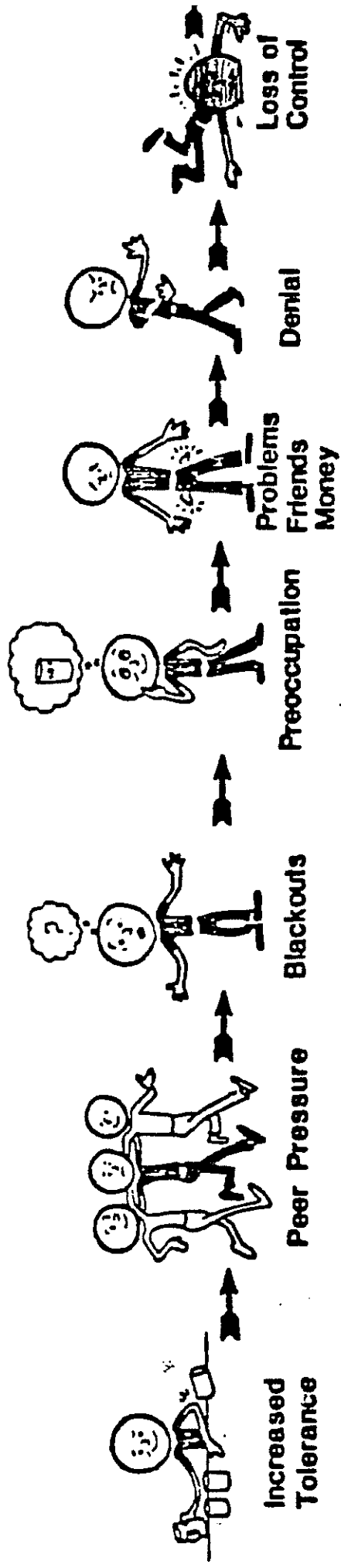
A Self-Assessment Guide for Youth

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SIGNS OF A DEVELOPING PROBLEM



1

Chemicals and Feelings

Our feelings are our emotional responses to what we're thinking or doing or to what's happening to us. Our moods are made up of many feelings. Some of our feelings—such as sadness, shame, and anger—are painful, so we usually try to avoid them. Other feelings—such as love, excitement, pride, and happiness—are pleasurable, so we naturally like to experience them. Most people experience a wide range of feelings and moods in a typical day.

Many people learn that chemicals (booze, marijuana, "uppers," or whatever) can give them good feelings and moods. They also learn that they usually return to feeling "normal" after the effects of chemicals wear off.

Unfortunately, many who've been regularly using chemicals find they can no longer cope with everyday feelings and situations without the chemicals. This is because they've learned to rely on chemicals to help them express certain feelings (for example, they feel confident or courageous after using alcohol) or to help them cover unwanted feelings (they feel less stress or anxiety after using marijuana). When people begin to rely on chemicals, they often find it hard to admit or express their true feelings *even when they're not using them*.

Below is a list of some basic feelings. Tell about a time when you've felt this way.

Angry:

Sad:

Happy:

Scared:

Ashamed:

Guilty:

Check the proper column to indicate how often you usually experience each of these feelings.

	Never	Seldom	Rather often	Very often
Angry				
Sad				
Happy				
Scared				
Ashamed				
Guilty				

Tell why and in what circumstances you've used chemicals to change or manage these feelings.

Angry:

Sad:

Happy:

Scared:

Ashamed:

Guilty:

2

Chemicals and Behavior

Behavior refers to what we do or how we act. Because our behavior can be seen and described, it often affects others, whether for good or ill.

We've seen that chemicals can strongly affect our feelings. But they can also affect our behavior. For example, people think of Frank as nice, quiet, and mild-mannered, but he thinks of himself as shy and not very likable. So he likes to have a few beers because he believes they make him less shy and more likable. Actually, though, he becomes loud and rude.

Like Frank, many who regularly use chemicals begin to lose touch with how they behave when they use them, and they don't see how their behavior is hurting themselves and others.

Three kinds of chemical-use behaviors are especially important.

1. Acquisition Behaviors: setting aside time to use chemicals; finding ways to get the money (legally or illegally) to buy chemicals; actually buying or otherwise getting the chemicals; creating opportunities to use them.

List some of the ways in which you've acquired the time, money, and opportunity to use chemicals.

2. Intoxication Behaviors: how someone acts while under the influence of chemicals; for example, loud, rude, silly, aggressive, angry, brave, irresponsible, sexy, mellow, violent.

Describe how you act while under the influence of chemicals.

Tell what others say about your intoxication behavior.

3. Restitution Behaviors: making up for the bad effects of chemical-use behavior, such as having to pay off borrowed or stolen money, having to apologize for embarrassing or harming family or friends.

List some of the ways in which you've made up for the bad effects of your chemical use.

3

Chemicals, School, and Work

School is an important place for learning and growing. It helps one acquire the skills necessary for daily living, and it provides opportunities to develop new talents, make friends, and have fun.

For most young people, having a job is also important. A job provides money for our wants and needs. It can give us a sense of purpose, make us feel important. It teaches responsibility, commitment, and self-discipline.

Our regular attendance, active participation, and high-quality performance at school or work indicates a high level of responsibility, commitment, and self-discipline. Poor attendance, non-participation, and declining level of performance in such activities can of course be due to many causes: changing interests and priorities, sickness, lack of ability, personality clashes. But they can also be caused by chemical use.

If our attraction to chemicals becomes strong enough, then our attendance, participation, and performance in school/job activities will probably begin to change and suffer, despite our best intentions.

· Explain how your chemical use has affected each of these areas at school and work.

Attendance:

Degree of participation:

Level of performance:

4

Chemicals and Friends

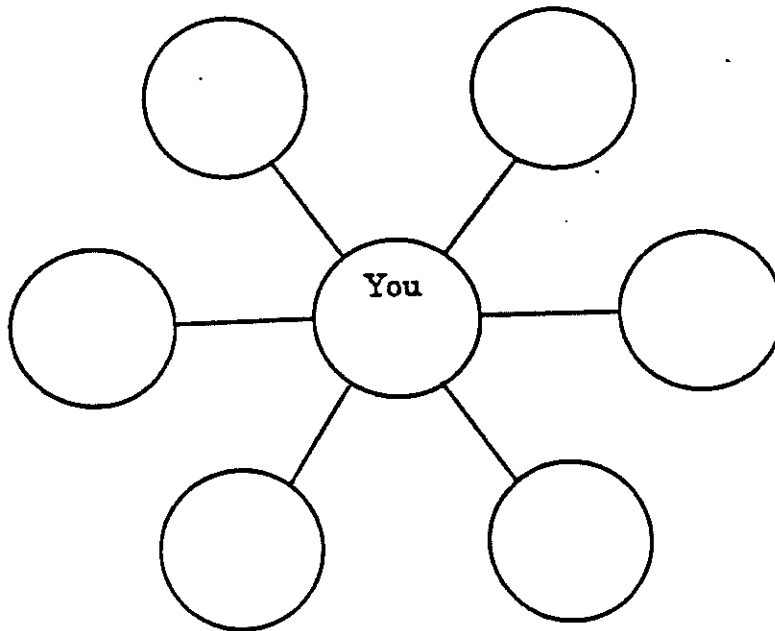
Friendships can offer companionship, closeness, support, entertainment, and a sense of belonging. For some people, making friends is relatively easy, and they have many friends. For others, making friends is much more difficult, and they have few friends. Regardless of the number of friends a person has, friends usually stay friends as long as they share the same interests.

As people mature and change their interests and activities, they may also change their friendships. They drop some friends, get new ones, or change the level of their closeness. So we can label a person as a mere acquaintance, friend, close friend, best friend, or former friend.

For many steady chemical users, chemicals become a regular part of their friendships. As their involvement with chemicals increases, their expectations of friendships may change. Steady chemical users often expect their friends to use chemicals in the same way they do. As a result, they begin to seek out, hang around with, and become friends with people who share their own interest in using chemicals regularly.

The quality of our friendships can be lessened by using chemicals, especially if we're using chemicals to express or hide our feelings (see Section 1, on feelings). Friendships between steady chemical users often lack the "realness" or closeness that comes when people openly share themselves with others without the aid of mood-altering chemicals.

Below is a Friendship Diagram. Place your name in the middle and your current and former friends' names in the surrounding circles (you needn't use all the circles).



Next, show the closeness of your relationship with each of your friends by writing one of the following labels on each line: friend, close friend, best friend, former friend.

Now answer the following questions about your circle of friends.

What activities do you and your friends enjoy and do together?

Which of these activities involve the use of chemicals?

List each current friend and tell how your relationship with that person has been affected by the use of chemicals.

Now list each former friend and tell how your relationship with that person has been affected by the use of chemicals.

5

Chemicals and Family

A family is a group of persons who live together or are closely connected, either by marriage, blood, choice, or circumstances—persons who interact with and care about what happens to one another on a day-to-day basis.

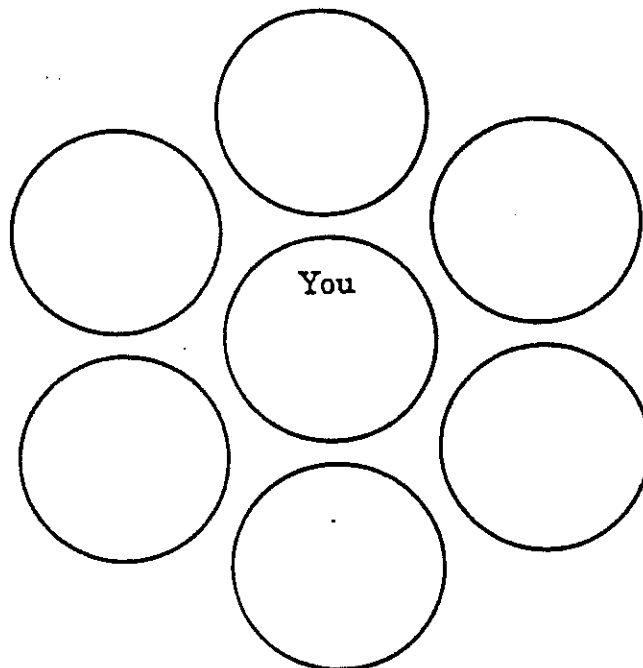
Families can be structured in many different ways. Members can feel very close to one another, very distant, or somewhere in between.

Families usually develop *rules*--like who takes out the garbage, or when curfew begins. These rules guide the actions of individual family members, so that they know what's expected of them and can feel they belong to the family and are really contributing to it.

Family members also assume *roles* that help them either observe or challenge the family rules in certain ways, like being "the breadwinner," "the good student," "the black sheep." Rules and roles help determine how family members get along with one another.

A family member who becomes a steady chemical user upsets the family balance by challenging family rules, straining family relationships, and creating a powerful but harmful role for himself or herself. Tensions and pressures build as family members react to what the chemical user is doing to each of them.

Below is a Family Relationships Diagram. Place your name in the middle and your family members' names in the surrounding circles. Then place an "X" next to the name of any person who you believe uses chemicals excessively or inappropriately.



In the space below, briefly tell how persons you've named have reacted to or been affected by your use of chemicals.

What would you like to change about your family? Consider your family's rules and roles when answering this question.

6

Chemicals and Self-Concept

Our self-concept is the picture we have of ourselves and whether or not we like what we see. Mark might describe himself as funny, likable, shy, or stubborn. Karen might tell herself that others are out to get her. Debbie might believe she's too fat or not good at sports.

Our self-concept depends partly on how we interpret what's happening to us. For example, when Lisa turns down Dave for a date, he really believes she's busy, so he calls someone else. When Lisa turns Scott down, he feels rejected and unlikable.

Self-concept can also be influenced by chemical use. Steady chemical users often believe that chemicals make them more confident, more interesting to be with, more attractive, even sexier. But steady chemical users find that their use of chemicals gets them in trouble with teachers, parents, or the police, besides turning off their friends. So their self-concept goes downhill.

Regardless of whether a person feels positive or negative about himself or herself as a result of chemical use, most steady chemical users come to believe that being intoxicated or high is one of the few ways they can feel good about themselves. In fact, many steady chemical users report that without chemicals, they feel quite lonely, depressed, and unlovable.

Below is a list of traits dealing with self-concept. Check only the ones that apply to you.

Traits

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good as a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Attractive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible | <input type="checkbox"/> Likable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unlikable | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious | <input type="checkbox"/> Boring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Dumb |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weak | <input type="checkbox"/> Smart |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexy | <input type="checkbox"/> Ugly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor student | <input type="checkbox"/> Outgoing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bad temper | <input type="checkbox"/> Stubborn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lots of interests | <input type="checkbox"/> Powerful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Insecure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Good sense of humor |

How has using chemicals affected your self-concept?

7

Chemicals and Growing Up

Growing up and becoming an adult can be an exciting, challenging, confusing, difficult, wonderful process. Adolescence is a time when nature, family, and society require the young person to accomplish a variety of growing-up tasks. Some of these tasks are: adjusting to physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual changes; developing a solid sense of personal identity (which includes self-esteem); achieving independence from parents; building a network of friendships, and planning for the future.

When a young person becomes involved with chemicals during this period, he or she interferes with, delays, or even stops the natural growth process and healthy development.

Many steady chemical users find that they come to rely on their chemical use to help them accomplish their growing-up goals. These persons usually don't mature as quickly or as well as their non-chemical-using peers who are learning and practicing the attitudes, skills, and behaviors of healthy, successful adults.

How have chemicals affected you or kept you from accomplishing each of the following growing-up goals?

Adjusting to changes; physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual:

Developing an identity:

Gaining independence:

Making friends:

Planning for the future:

List which growing-up goals you need to work on, and tell why.

8

Chemicals and Recreation

Our society offers a wide range of recreational activities, such as sports, hobbies, the outdoors, dancing, music, movies, the arts. People value these activities for many different reasons: for instance, because they provide physical exercise, a sense of creativity or accomplishment, or just fun and relaxation.

Generally, people *start* using chemicals so they'll enjoy *activities* more: to make the party more fun, to better appreciate the music, to add more excitement to a football game.

But as chemical use becomes more important to steady chemical users, they come to enjoy the *pleasurable effects* of the chemicals even more than they enjoy the activities. As time goes on, the fun centers around *the chemical*, not around the activity. For example, Sally used to believe that school dances were simply more fun if she had a few drinks beforehand. As her interest in drinking increased, though, she attended fewer dances because drinking opportunities were limited, and she started going to more "keggers" because she knew there'd be plenty of beer.

Eventually, steady chemical users have difficulty enjoying an activity unless they're high or intoxicated.

List your interests, hobbies, and activities. How often do you participate in them?
How are chemicals involved?

How have chemicals affected your ability to have fun?

9

Chemicals and Spirituality

For many people, their spirituality centers around an organized religion represented by a church or synagogue as the place of worship and by the clergy as spiritual leaders. For others, their spirituality is less structured; it focuses more on how they relate to fellow humans and to the world around them. For still others, their spirituality centers around a personal relationship with God or with some Higher Power, but they may not be members of any church or religion.

Whatever kind of spirituality people believe in and practice, it seems to help them find deeper meaning in life. They have real concern about where they've come from, where they're headed, what life adds up to. They believe, for instance, in the importance of being fair, loving, kind, and helpful to family and friends; in being responsible and keeping their word. In practice, of course, many experiences—such as poverty, sickness, hunger, or injustice—make it difficult for them to live up to these ideals.

Chemicals, too, can affect our spiritual life as truly as they can affect other areas of our life. Many persons who regularly use chemicals put their spiritual life and growth on hold, or give it up completely. Spiritual values no longer mean anything to them. They live just to have "fun," and mostly that means getting high. It also means escaping the many kinds of trouble brought on them by their use of chemicals, even if that means lying, cheating, or blaming someone else.

What spiritual beliefs and practices did you have when you were growing up in your family?

What are your spiritual beliefs and practices now?

How have chemicals affected your spiritual beliefs and practices?

10

Chemicals and Defenses

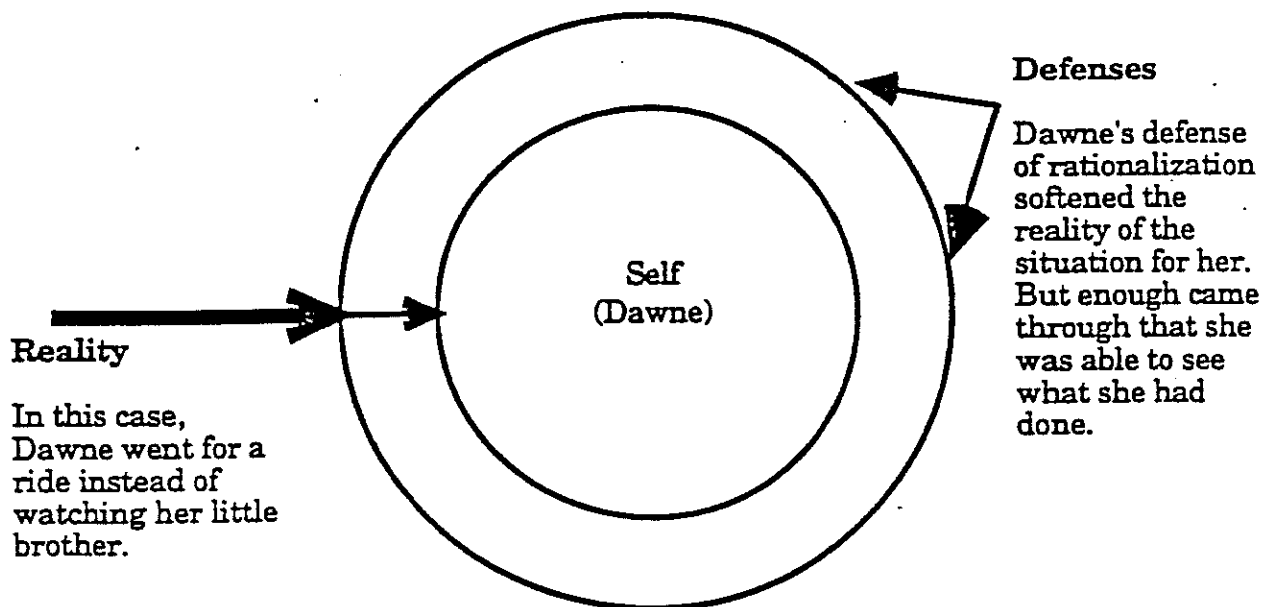
People naturally develop defenses to protect themselves from threatening or uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or situations. This is a normal process that helps them cope with fear, frustration, anxiety, and conflict.

We use defenses to *deny* or "change" reality to prevent ourselves from becoming aware of painful thoughts, to avoid painful feelings, to escape situations that are threatening (or seem to be), and to protect ourselves from facing the unpleasant consequences of our own behavior.

For example, Dawne occasionally babysat her younger brother after school. One day Dawne's boyfriend James came over to take her for a ride in his new car. Although Dawne knew she shouldn't leave her brother at home alone, even for a moment, she rationalized going by telling herself, "I'll only be gone a little while. And anyway, my brother's taking a nap and won't even know I'm gone." Unfortunately for Dawne, while she was away her mother came home unexpectedly and was very frightened and angry to find her young son unattended.

When Dawne returned, her mother was furious and confronted Dawne on her irresponsible behavior. Then Dawne realized what she'd done. She felt guilty, admitted her mistake, and promised it would never happen again.

Dawne first used a defense, *rationalization*, to convince herself that it was OK to take a ride with her boyfriend. But when her mother confronted her with the reality of the situation, Dawne chose to accept reality (and to experience her feelings) rather than to continue rationalizing her wrongdoing. This is an example of a *normal defense*— a defense that the normal person wisely abandons when confronted with the real situation.

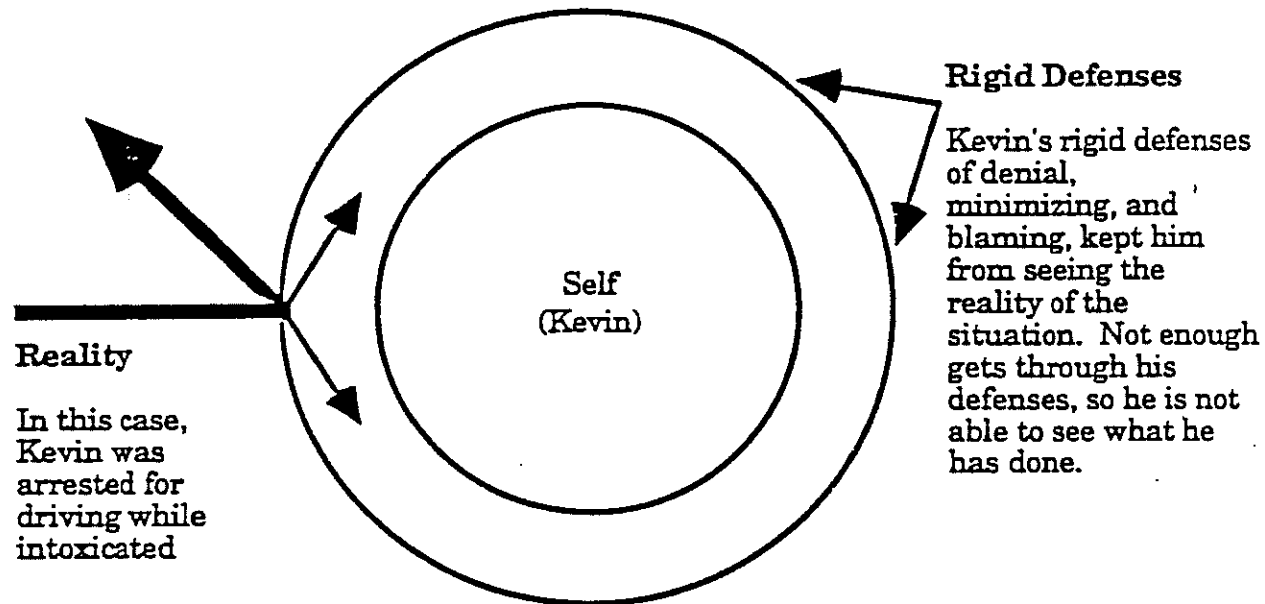


Normal defenses change the way we see a situation in order to make it "softer" or easier to deal with. However, one is still able to let in enough outside information about the real situation to adjust one's thinking, as Dawne did when her mother confronted her.

Steady chemical users, though, often become less able to accept painful reality, especially when confronted with the harmful consequences of their chemical use. This is partly because of the powerful "masking effects" of chemicals on feelings (see section 1) that cause a person to lose touch with the real situation. It also happens because as time goes on, steady chemical users' defenses become stronger and more rigid and therefore block out the insight they need if they're to change.

For example, Kevin was driving home from a party when he was stopped by the police because of his loud muffler. The officer smelled alcohol and gave him a breath test which he failed. He was arrested and jailed overnight, was later found guilty, had to pay a fine, and had his license taken away.

Kevin felt no remorse and accepted no responsibility for his actions. He *minimized* the seriousness of the offense, *denied* having had more than three beers that night, and *blamed* his conviction on the "stupid cops who've got nothing better to do than hassle people who are just out for a good time." This is an example of using *rigid or harmful defenses*.



In this case, harmful defenses protected Kevin so completely that he filtered out all the painful information. As a result, he was really blind to his situation, so he wasn't able to change his behavior or to make amends.

Below are some common defenses used by steady chemical users. Answer the questions that follow.

Denying: refusing to recognize or accept reality.

How have you used denial to protect yourself from the consequences of your chemical use?

Rationalizing: inventing excuses so as to make unacceptable behavior seem acceptable.

How have you used rationalization to justify your chemical use?

Blaming: trying to make other people, places, or things responsible for the wrong things you have done.

How have you blamed other people, places, or things for your irresponsible behavior?

Minimizing: making something look less serious than it is.

How have you minimized what you've done or what's happened to you because of your chemical use?

11

Chemicals and Wellness

Wellness means being healthy physically, emotionally, and mentally. As one might expect, it involves both things to do and things to avoid.

To be physically well, one needs to exercise regularly, eat right, and get enough rest and recreation. But it also means *preventing or eliminating* from one's lifestyle anything that causes accidents, sickness, or early death. Not eating junk foods, not smoking, wearing a seat belt, never driving while high—these are just a few ways of becoming and staying well.

People who are emotionally and mentally well have a good self-image. They know who they are and what they want to achieve. They have a set of values and live up to them. They have a sense of belonging, of being accepted. They like people and get along with them—with family, friends, and others they associate with every day. They know that life isn't all smooth sailing, so they learn how to handle stress; they're not ashamed to ask for support from their family and friends or to seek professional help when they need it.

Many steady chemical users, in time, experience serious health problems, get into more accidents, and even die because of their chemical use.

To be more specific, some of the health problems brought on by chemical use are:

- **Neglecting one's body:** not getting regular checkups, enough proper food, exercise, or sleep.
- **Emotional distress:** feelings of isolation, boredom, loneliness, severe depression, frequent mood-swings, anxiety, fear.
- **Self-destructive tendencies:** drunk driving, fights, binge use or overdosing on chemicals, excessive hostility, thinking about or attempting suicide.
- **Other problems:** hospitalization, detoxifications, encounters with police, frequent hangovers, other aches, pains, or illnesses.

Describe how your chemical use has harmed your physical, emotional, and/or mental health:

Have you ever attempted to hurt yourself or kill yourself, or thought seriously of doing so? Explain.

12

Patterns of Chemical Use

Many who use chemicals regularly and depend on them to help them cope with life find that a pattern of use develops. This pattern of chemical use depends on who you're with, what you're doing, where and when you're doing it, and how available chemicals are at the time.

Complete the following chart. Check how many times you have used each of these chemicals, and tell how old you were when you first used each.

	Never	Once or twice	3-12 times	13-30 times	Over 30 times	Age at first use
Marijuana/Hash						
Alcohol (booze, beer, wine)						
Inhalants (gas, glue, Rush™)						
Speed (White Cross, Meth, uppers, crank)						
Downers (barbs, tranqs, ludes)						
Hallucinogens (LSD, peyote, mushrooms)						
PCP (dust, alone or on pot)						
Narcotics (opium, heroin, codeine, Demerol™)						
Cocaine (snow, crack)						
Cigarettes						
Others (tell which ones)						

How often have you used these chemicals in the past six months? Check the appropriate box.

	Never	Once or twice	1-3 Per Mo	1-3 Per wk	Other	Daily
Marijuana/Hash						
Alcohol (booze, beer, wine)						
Inhalants (gas, glue, Rush™)						
Speed (White Cross, Meth, uppers, crank)						
Downers (barbs, tranqs, ludes)						
Hallucinogens (LSD, peyote, mushrooms)						
PCP (dust, alone or on pot)						
Narcotics (opium, heroin, codeine, Demerol™)						
Cocaine (snow, crack)						
Cigarettes						
Others (tell which ones)						

What is your favorite chemical or combination of chemicals?

Describe what the chemical(s) does/do for you.

How do you get the money for your chemical use?

How has your chemical use gotten you in trouble with
your family?

your friends?

your school?

the law?

Where do you most often use chemicals?

When do you most often use them?

Who are you usually with when you use chemicals, or do you usually use them alone?

When is your urge to use chemicals the strongest?

13

Chemical Abuse and Dependence

Chemical dependence (CD) results from continued, untreated chemical abuse. It's an illness that is:

- **Primary:** CD has its own special set of symptoms, just as mumps or measles does.
- **Progressive:** CD symptoms get worse if left untreated.
- **Chronic:** CD is continuous, ongoing; like diabetes, once you have it, you have it for life. Treatment doesn't cure the disease; it stops it from progressing. That is, treatment gives the chemically dependent person a chance to really see what chemicals are doing to him or her. It provides the person with a clear choice: to take part in a daily recovery program and live a normal, happy life without chemicals, or to go back to using them.
- **Fatal:** If left untreated, CD causes an early death.

Here are some reliable signs that someone is chemically dependent. He or she has:

1. **A destructive relationship with chemicals:** for example, loss of interest in healthy activities and relationships with people; preoccupation with getting and using chemicals.
2. **Serious problems with family, friends, school, health, the law:** for example, fights at home, broken friendships, getting expelled, being sick a lot, getting arrested for driving while high or for stealing.
3. **A rigid defense system:** for example, uses denial, rationalization, blaming and minimizing when confronted with the consequences of his/her chemical use.
4. **Loss of control over chemical use:** for example, excessive use, use alone, failed attempts to set limits of use or to cut down or quit.
5. **Other signs of chemical dependence:** for example, increased tolerance for the chemical(s) (needing more and more chemicals to get high), blackouts*, cravings for the chemicals.

Describe how your use of chemicals has affected you in each of the following areas. (It might be helpful to review this Guide before answering.)

■ Using chemicals to manage or control feelings:

■ Personality changes when using chemicals:

■ Legal problems:

■ Problems in school:

■ Problems in family relationships:

* A blackout is often confused with passing out. But the two aren't the same, even though a drinker can pass out *during* a blackout. Passing out means unconsciousness: the drinker appears to fall asleep abruptly. A blackout is different and usually has nothing to do with falling asleep. It's amnesia: a period of seconds, minutes, hours, or even days during which the drinker is awake and active but later remembers nothing about the events that took place.

■ Changing friendships or interests:

■ Feelings of low self-worth:

■ Health problems:

■ Becoming more defensive:

■ Losing control:

Here are some warning signs of possible chemical dependence.

Check the ones that apply to you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Using chemicals alone | 9. <input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupation with using chemicals |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Needing more of a chemical to get high | 10. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of alternatives to using chemicals |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Blackouts | 11. <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in behavior |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Using chemicals more than intended | 12. <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent intoxications |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Using to have fun | 13. <input type="checkbox"/> "Conning" and excuses |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Using to relieve pain | 14. <input type="checkbox"/> Other family chemical users |
| 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Failed attempts to quit | 15. <input type="checkbox"/> Failed attempts to limit or cut down |
| 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Using before or during school | |

List and explain any other warning signs that apply to you.

In view of what you have learned about yourself, do you believe you're chemically dependent? Explain why or why not.

14

Goals: Developing an Action Plan

A chemical user who finally recognizes and admits that chemical use has become a problem has already taken an important first step on the road to change and recovery.

The next step consists of developing an *action plan*. This plan consists in stating a number of specific *behavioral goals* (improved ways of acting) and then listing factors that will *help* us move closer to those goals and factors that will *hinder* us from reaching those goals.

Here's an example of setting a goal and sizing up factors that help or hinder someone who's trying to reach it.

Goal: To stop using chemicals

Helpful Factors

Strong reasons for changing
Willingness to change
Strong support for changing (such as loyal family, straight friends)
Hopefulness
Healthy self-esteem
Strong commitment to goals
Alternative activities (such as sports, hobbies, job, volunteer work, creative arts)
Good reputation
Professional guidance

Hindering Factors

Few reasons for changing
Lack of willingness to change
Little support (such as an unhelpful family, few straight friends)
Hopelessness
Low self-esteem
Weak commitment to goals, lack of follow-through
Few or poor alternative activities
Poor reputation
No professional guidance
Unsuccessful prior attempts at quitting or cutting down

If after completing this workbook you recognize that you need to change and grow, write three or four behavioral goals.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Now make your own list of factors that you think will help you and hinder you as you try to reach the goals you've set for yourself.

Helpful Factors

Hindering Factors

Afterword

Congratulations! You've just made an investment in your future. After honestly and thoroughly completing this Guide you now know the ways in which chemicals have affected your life. It probably wasn't easy, but you probably learned some things about yourself that you hadn't realized before. You're now in a position to make changes that can affect the rest of your life.

If you discovered that chemicals have really harmed you and others and that you need to make some changes in your life, your next step is to get some professional help. Talk to your parents, talk to a counselor, talk to a trusted friend. Or, consult your local telephone directory for a treatment center near you. Look under "alcoholism" or "drug abuse." Professional treatment programs provide hope and recovery to those in need.

Wherever your path takes you, good luck on your journey!