

Overcoming Obstacles

Addictions

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Addictions are often ruinous to a marriage.

If you or your spouse in the past month has taken a drink first thing in the morning to help you recover from a hangover you may be dealing with an addiction problem. There are other possible symptoms, as well. For instance, as a person with an alcohol addiction you may have gotten home from a party in one piece, and even though your car went up on the lawn a bit, you were able to park it and get into the house. But if you don't know how that scratch on the rear bumper got there, you are showing addiction symptoms.

You may tell yourself, "It must have been someone else who did that" but this is part of your denial. Maybe you say, "What's the big deal, almost all of my friends are serious drinkers. They drink way more than I ever do." Such rationalizations also indicate a problem. Most people with an alcohol problem will report that they know exactly how much they drink each night, although they usually low ball the number. They may say, "It's not even the hard stuff, it's only wine or a couple of beers." If your wife or husband complains about it, you write it off as just so much nagging.

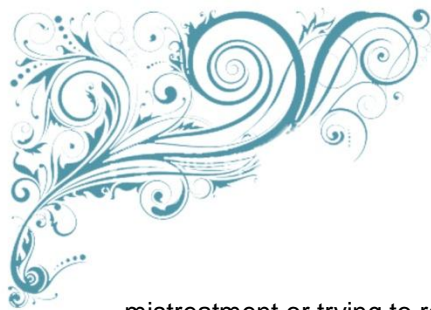
If any of this is familiar, or if you or someone close to you thinks you have a problem with alcohol or drugs, most likely you do. If you have a loved one who has this problem you need to get help. Substance abuse and addictions do not disappear; rather, they only get worse when left untreated. Substance abuse, which includes alcohol addiction, is a major problem in the United States, and it is a major source of marital breakups and family problems. It affects all the members of the family, not just the one abusing drugs or alcohol.

Individuals with alcohol or other substance addictions have a distorted sense of reality. They will justify hiding their addiction from family and friends. They might even explain that they drink or escape through drugs to deal with a spouse who makes life difficult, or because they have a stressful job, or their children are such problems.

When their addiction worsens – and it will – they will tell you that the police were unjustified when they got the DUI, or that this really was just a one-time fluke. Even when they begin to have blackouts- memory lapses due to the intoxication- they are able to deny this to you and to themselves.

In addition to the person with the addiction, there is often a spouse who suffers from co-dependency. One of definitions of co-dependency is a set of maladaptive, compulsive behaviors learned by family members in order to survive in a family which is experiencing great emotional pain and stress. As adults, co-dependent people have a greater tendency to get involved in relationships with people who are unreliable, emotionally unavailable, or needy. A co-dependent person tries to control everything within the relationship- but can't.

"Recovery" for co-dependent spouses comes when they eventually address their own needs instead of tolerating



mistreatment or trying to rescue their spouse. Whether the addictive behavior is relatively minor or more serious, often it is the co-dependent spouse who starts the recovery process by first addressing his or her own need for assertiveness plus improving listening and communication skills. Counseling can bring awareness of dysfunctional behaviors, and help the couple develop new, healthier coping skills.

The denial that accompanies an addiction is a family problem because it often includes the spouse as well. Spouses may cover up for their partner, make excuses, call in to an employer and say he/she is sick when it is really a hangover. They will overlook the fender bender accident. Most of all they tolerate the lack of physical and emotional availability from their spouse due to their "affair" with drugs or alcohol.

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#), known as A.A., and the other 12-Step programs are a great resource. Meetings are held morning, noon and night. Individuals get the support of a sponsor- someone who has gone through the process of recovery and lives their life fully. These people are models of living a life of sobriety. For the spouse of someone with an addiction, as well as for their children, there are [Al-anon](#) and [Narconon](#) meetings. They support and encourage, and help the co-dependent spouse to stop the ways that he or she may have inadvertently been enabling the addicted person.

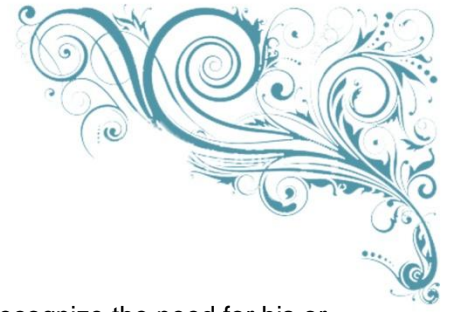
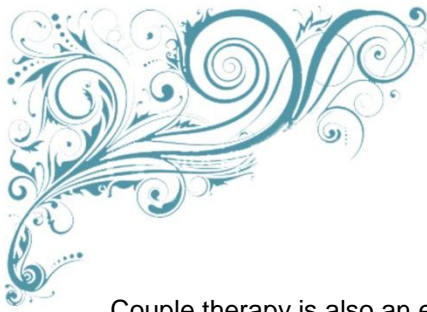
With the emergence of the internet, sexual addictions have become an even greater problem. Sexual addictions can range from masturbation to pornographic magazines and videos, to infidelity and paying for sex. It may even be as pathological as breaking into apartments and raping unsuspecting residents. This stage of sexual addiction requires major intervention and usually results in criminal charges as well. Whatever the magnitude of sexual addiction, the one thing all have in common is that the need for sex is more important than the addict's feelings for his/her spouse.

Addictions are often ruinous to a marriage if they are allowed to continue. They are compulsive behaviors that are usually fueled by deeply seated anger or fear of intimacy. You might be married to a person who was shamed in early childhood. They might have had poor or no sexual education, experienced a parent that sexually acted out, or had serious childhood trauma. They may be a victim of incest or sexual abuse. Sexual acting out in these compulsive ways, as well as other addictions, often indicate emotional pain. They are also used as a substitute for true intimacy.

Treatment often takes the form of individual, marital, and group therapy. Key tasks for recovery include, first and foremost, breaking through the denial. Sometimes this requires that the co-dependent spouse first break his or her own denial and also learn about the addiction process and how one goes about establishing sobriety. Then it is a matter of getting the addict/alcoholic to start a treatment plan. For many, A.A. or N.A. can be an effective solution. For others it can be the starting point in combination with therapy.

Sometimes it is necessary to create an intervention. This is a well-prepared and pre-planned meeting with a professional counselor, family, friends, and perhaps colleagues from work who meet with the addicted person. The participants confront the person with the addiction and the consequences that the addicted behaviors are having on the family, friends and workplace. Usually there is a pre-arranged treatment plan that may include an initial hospital phase, either as an in-patient or outpatient. Hospitalization may be necessary for those who have serious drug or alcohol dependency problems and who need a detoxification first step. Professionals can provide more information. After this initial phase of treatment, it is a matter of establishing sobriety and creating a healthier environment to support continued sobriety. This phase is not easy, as there may be setbacks. This is where 12-Step programs are particularly valuable in reinforcing motivation.





Couple therapy is also an essential part of recovery. A spouse may not be able to recognize the need for his or her involvement, but recovery is much more successful when both spouses are involved. If the addicted person attends A.A., and the spouse possibly attends Al-anon meetings, plus they receive marriage counseling, the marital relationship is more likely to stabilize and the couple can work through the trauma they experienced from the addicted partner's behaviors. There is also [Retrouvaille](#), a program for married couples who are hurting. It is not specifically for addictions, but it does assist any couple that has experienced a major disillusionment.

With addictions comes the need for reconciliation and forgiveness for the damage caused in the marriage. With help, hard work, and the right kind of support, many couples are able to heal their marriage and create a new and healthier marital life- something they could not have imagined while in the midst of their crisis. With time, patience, and persistence trust can be restored and a new level of intimacy reached. By moving beyond the initial denial and earnestly working each recovery step, a couple can heal and reclaim a life a sobriety from addictive behaviors.

RESOURCES:

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (A.A.)

[Al-anon](#) is for spouses, children, parents, or close friends of alcoholics or teens dealing with alcohol problems.

[Narconon](#) is a non-profit drug rehabilitation program dedicated to eliminating drug abuse and drug addiction.

[Retrouvaille](#) (pronounced retro-vi with a long i) means "rediscovery." It consists of a weekend experience combined with a series of 6-12 post-weekend sessions over three months. The main emphasis is on communication between husband and wife. There are neither group dynamics nor group discussion on the weekend.

[The Third Option](#) is a group program for marriages. It combines 14 unique skill-building workshops, sharing by mentor couples who have overcome marital problems, and support groups. Because it uses a "self-change" model, one spouse may come alone.

