

Alcohol Abuse Treatment By Dr. Katrina Kuzyszyn-Jones

It's quite common for people to present for treatment after the holidays. Sometimes this is because drama occurs with family members and sometimes it's due to the legal implications of drinking and driving. My office provides treatment for alcohol use, particularly when people have become involved with the legal system.

Alcohol use can potentially lead to some very serious legal issues. The biggest problem arises when an individual makes the decision to get behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. The driver runs the risk of hurting themselves and others due to their decreased levels of awareness and cognitive functioning. If that does not happen, the driver is also at risk for being apprehended by the police while driving under the influence, most commonly referred to as a DUI or DWI. In North Carolina, the consequences for a DUI are among some of the most severe in the nation. For an individual's first drunk driving infraction, the punishment can include up to a \$4,000 fine, a one-year license suspension, 24 hours of community service, and a two year jail sentence. The consequences increase in severity with each new DUI charge, eventually resulting in the loss of voting rights, the ability to leave the country, and the potential for a 59 month jail sentence. If an individual is already involved with the legal system, such as through divorce proceedings, there may be additional custody complications.

In addition to carrying legal repercussions, alcohol abuse carries with it great personal costs. Alcohol abuse can negatively affect your relationships with friends, family, classmates and coworkers. There are common symptoms of frequent alcohol abuse that include neglecting responsibilities, risk taking, getting into legal trouble, and changes in personal relationships. If you are concerned that a friend or loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol, there are some physical, behavioral, and psychological signs of which to be aware. Some physical symptoms include bloodshot pupils, changes in appetite, slurred speech, or and deterioration of physical appearance. Behavioral symptoms include a drop in attendance/performance at work or school, secretive or suspicious behavior, and frequently getting into trouble. Psychological signs include an unexplained change in personality, sudden mood swings, and becoming fearful, anxious or paranoid for no reason. When these signs become apparent, it is important to seek help immediately.

There are many helpful treatments for alcohol abuse. Behavioral treatments work to help clients modify their attitudes and behaviors related to alcohol abuse in addition to increasing their healthy life skills. Outpatient behavioral and residential treatments are very common approaches in the treatment of alcohol abuse problems. Outpatient treatment (office based) includes individual cognitive-behavioral therapy, multidimensional family therapy, motivational interviewing, and motivational incentives.

Cognitive behavioral therapy helps clients recognize, avoid, and cope with the situations in which they are most likely to abuse alcohol. Multidimensional family therapy addresses how the family dynamic influences an individual's alcohol use, and it is designed to improve overall family functioning. This type of therapy addresses both the client's recovery as well as the need for a repairing of the family unit as a whole. Motivational interviewing and incentives techniques

involve both assessing the client's readiness to enter treatment and encouraging continued abstinence through positive reinforcement.

Residential treatment is another viable option that involves a client remaining in a treatment facility. An example of this type of facility is a "treatment community". These programs are quite structured and require the clients to remain in the residence for a specific period, usually about 6 to 12 months. The goal of facilities such as these is to be re-socialized towards a an alcohol free lifestyle in a supportive environment. Generally, people present to a residential treatment program after they have legal involvement or have unsuccessfully engaged in outpatient treatment. Whatever treatment you choose, it is important to know that the biggest step is asking for and receiving the appropriate help.

Learn more about Dr. Katrina Kuzyszyn-Jones at www.kkjpsych.com.