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THE STAGES OF ADDICTION

By Walt Mueller

Teens who abuse drugs and alcohol on a regular basis risk becoming one of the millions of kids who have serious problems with addiction.

In their book *Adolescents, Alcohol and Drugs*, Judith Jaynes and Cheryl Rugg describe the stages of drug and alcohol addiction among teens.

STAGE 1: EXPERIMENTATION

This is the time when the teen's occasional use leads to mood changes that are generally positive and enjoyable with few or no side effects. The change is reliable, predictable, and enjoyable. They feel the same sensation each time they use the drug. Not all adolescents stay in the experimentation stage. Some, their curiosity satisfied, quit. Others move on to stage 2.

STAGE 2: SOCIAL USE

Adolescents remain in control of how much they use, when they use, and the effects of use. The use is moderate and for the purpose of fitting in. Kids in this stage will limit alcohol and drug use to weekend parties and social gatherings.

STAGE 3: MISUSE

The focus shifts from socializing to a personal desire to get high. The euphoric effect becomes more important than having a good time with friends. Use becomes more frequent and is not limited to weekends and parties.

STAGE 4: ABUSE

When an adolescent enters this stage, there is a preoccupation with being high. It is during this stage that parents, friends, and family members begin to see the obvious and ugly effects of substance abuse in the life of the adolescent. Many kids in this stage will steal to support their daily habit. The goal of the teen is to stay high since a letdown leads to depression and aggressive behavior.

STAGE 5: CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

When teens are depending on drugs and alcohol to feel normal, they have entered this stage. No longer does the teen find alcohol and drugs to be fun. The sense of euphoria is gone. Getting and taking drugs become a matter of survival. If daily, twenty-four-hour use is interrupted, the adolescent feels powerless to function physically or mentally.¹

Drug and alcohol addiction is the ugly end to what begins as curious experimentation. Drugs and alcohol become the objects of worship in a life of physical and psychological dependency.

¹Judith H. Jaynes and Cheryl A. Rugg, *Adolescents, Alcohol and Drugs* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1988), 13-22.

Adapted from Walt Mueller's book, *Youth Culture 101*.