

Question: I have a friend who I think has a drinking problem. How do I know if it is a problem and what should I do.

Answer: Substance abuse is significant problem in our country. It's a complex issue that impacts the user, his or her family, friends, and work. One way to discover if your friend has a problem is to answer four questions. First, has he or she ever felt like they should cut down on how much they are drinking? Second, have they ever been annoyed by people criticizing their drinking? Third, have they ever felt bad or guilty about their drinking? Finally, have they ever had to have a drink first thing in the morning as an eye opener, or to steady their nerves, or to get over a hangover? An answer of yes to two or more of these questions may indicate that they have a problem with alcohol.

Substance abuse is a difficult problem to treat. Most substance abusers have tried to quit on multiple occasions. Unfortunately, many have failed to maintain sobriety. Even when they are not using, they still think like an addict.

Fortunately, there are a number of programs that have been shown to be effective. One of the oldest is Alcoholics Anonymous. Many people do not realize that the founders of AA, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, were Christians. They developed the twelve steps from the Bible. In particular, they used the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount as the basis for the 12 Steps. Unfortunately, many in AA are not aware of these spiritual roots and some in AA have been even hostile to organized religion. The good news is that there are Christian resources that are helpful. Let me recommend a few. The first is a workbook called "The Twelve Steps for Christians." It uses Scripture as the basis of the 12 steps. Another is Rick Warren's Celebrate Recovery program. If you are interested in reading more about the Christian basis for AA, I would recommend "The Good Book and The Big Book" by Dick B.

Most research today points to a combined treatment approach. These approaches combine twelve step programs (Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous) with cognitive behavioral techniques. The goal is to treat the whole person. In order to achieve sobriety, the substance abuse needs to not use and pay attention. That may sound simple but the process is difficult. The person whose life is under the control of substances needs to learn to identify and avoid things that trigger use. They need to learn to be aware of their thoughts and emotions. They need to learn how to live like a sober person. Most importantly, they need to become dependent on God. Only God can give the power to gain and maintain sobriety.