

## STAGES IN THE CO-DEPENDENT FAMILY

- I. Stage of Denial
  - A. Initial acceptance of “being high as normal” adolescent behavior.
  - B. “Rescue missions”. ( Family bails the adolescent out of trouble; assumes role of enabler)
  - C. Increasing family focus on the adolescent and his/her problems.
  - D. Sees chemical use as a problem, but not the problem and seeks advice of psychiatrist, psychologist, minister, councilor, etc.: who if not specifically trained in chemical dependency may act as enablers and reinforce the denial system.
  - E. Family loses perspective on their own harmful interaction as the chemically dependent adolescent becomes the center of attention.
  - F. May blame the adolescent’s behavior on “those kids he/she hangs around with.
  
- II. Stage of Bargaining and Attempts at Control
  - A. Appeals to logic.
  - B. Imposition of curfews and restrictions.
  - C. Adolescent forbidden to associate with peers considered “bad influences.”
  - D. Bargains, (i.e. “It’s all right to drink, but don’t use drugs.” “An occasional beer at home is alright, but stay away from hard liquor.” “If you must drink, don’t drive or get in a car with someone else who has been drinking.”)
  - E. May seek “geographic cures” – i.e. transfer to new schools, private or parochial, or to alternative program in an attempt to remove the adolescent from what is considered an unhealthy environment or peer group.
  
- III. Stage of Anger
  - A. Increasing tension and unhappiness at home.
  - B. Family distrustful and resentful.
  - C. Anger and frustration that the chemically dependent adolescent cannot be controlled.
  - D. Alcohol/drugs now the central focus of the family’s

attention.

- E. Progressive restructuring of roles in the family.
- F. Other children exhibit emotional problems.
- G. Marital stress, lack of communication and “blaming.”

#### IV. Stage of Depression

- A. Feelings of guilt, self pity, and despair as a parent; “What did we do wrong or fail to do?”
- B. May construct rigid pattern to escape family conflicts.
- C. Passive withdrawal and isolation of parents.
- D. Fears about the future.
- E. Possible stress related illness in other family members; i.e. headaches, insomnia, gastro-intestinal complaints, etc.

#### V. Crisis and Confrontation.

Although concern remains, the family is unable to tolerate the status-quo. Relationships are severed and the adolescent is forced out of the home. Or, the family seeks informed counseling and guidance; crisis is used in a constructive fashion to force the adolescent into assessment, intervention, and/or definitive treatment.