

## Personality Traits of Addiction

*Looking at addiction only from the standpoint of how much we use can keep people in denial. Addiction affects our brains, our emotional lives and our relational lives. The following are some traits associated with alcoholism, drug addiction, prescription addiction, sex addiction, codependency, compulsive gambling, work addiction, food addiction and other addictions. These alone don't necessary guarantee that one has a problem, but it helps us begin to look at the possibility of a problem. These traits usually occur long after the person has stopped using the substance, because the "fallout" is still present; hence, the term, "dry drunk."*

- Self Medication**—An addict uses the substance to fix situations and feel better. Mistakenly, they believe that they are only using it for social reasons or pain management, but in fact it is “helping” them cope with life.
- Numbing-Avoidance of Feeling**—For those who have a tendency toward addiction, feeling makes them feel vulnerable and out of control. Most likely their family growing up didn't allow for feelings and so they have no real practice on what to do when they feel a certain way. It was as if the family “*feeling thermostat*” was set to 55° and everyone this “*warm*.” When the substance comes along, it makes us feel better and comforts us against any unpleasant emotion.
- Continuing the Same Patterns in spite of causing harm** -- any addiction is about doing the same thing, whether drinking, drugging, shopping, gambling, fixing others, etc and it causes us harm. We should stop, but we can't. We feel in control, but we aren't if what we are doing is still harming us.
- Shame**—the term really refers to “*toxic shame*” which is different from “*healthy shame*” which helps us realize that we are human and “not God.” “*Toxic shame*” goes further and dehumanizes us and isolates us from the rest of humanity. We are less than others and instead accepting that people make mistakes, we feel we are “*a mistake*.” Due to toxic shame, we either admit no problems, where we act shameless, or we walk around full of shame. This manifests itself mainly in relationships where we either act “*better than*” or “*less than*.” Shame is responsible for a lot of the arguments in addictive relationships. Someone may be just trying to talk our behavior, but we personalize it, hear the message we are “*bad*” and defend ourselves.
- Denial**—is the coping mechanism of unawareness. It is really not about lying, but about a total unawareness that there is a problem. Oftentimes, the more severe the problem, the more denial there is.
- Minimizing**—is the coping mechanism of acknowledging something, but making it “*not that big of a thing*.” They often feel that people are making “*a mountain out of a mole hill*.”
- Normalizing**—This occurs when a person wants to feel normal, because of the shame they feel. So they surround themselves with other “*addicts*” who do the same level of drinking, sexing, avoiding, etc. so they feel normal. “*Everyone then must be an alcoholic*.”
- Blaming**—The alcoholic feels that “*they might be somewhat at fault, but they are sure that other people are more to blame*” for whatever is happening in their lives. Even when the have a legitimate complaint, the blame gets them stuck, causing them to not take

responsibility and find a solution. The problem is that they don't look as to how they contribute to the problem and, additionally, this gives them a sense of entitlement to use their substance.

- ❑ **Emotional Avoidance**—People who struggle with addiction aren't good at staying emotionally present. The exception is when they are angry which pushes people away. The “*addiction*” becomes the “*trusted source of comfort*” rather than people or God. Oftentimes, they are not emotionally aware of their feelings. This avoidance typically creates an “*emotional chase scene*” where one is emotionally trying to connect while the other runs away and avoids.
- ❑ **Grandiosity**—Due to lack of self esteem, shame and the momentary awareness that “*they are screwing up the lives,*” addicts become grandiose. They inflate their sense of self to help push people away to escape vulnerability. Sometimes their grandiosity is from achievements they have accomplished due to their “*needing to be perfect.*” Addicts have an uncanny sense of being able to have low self esteem and being the best of everything all at the same time.
- ❑ **Low Self Esteem**—This is slightly different than shame in that the person reveals their low self esteem to others. This usually can lead to depression, “*victim mentality*” and lack of change in behavior.
- ❑ **Controlling**—Really, it is about “*attempting to control.*” Control is somewhat of an illusion. We try to control what people think of us, our environments, our spouse, and our children. We are like a director who wants to run the whole show. If everyone would do as we wish the show would be great. But what happens. The world doesn't always cooperate. So we exert ourselves more by using kindness or meanness to get them to change. We are a victim of the delusion that we can get what we want out of life if only we manage well. [Look at Chapter 5 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*].
- ❑ **Codependency**—This is an addiction itself. We try to numb our feelings by fixing, thinking for, reminding, and acting as the conscience of those around us. We can be more in touch with their life than our own. We learn this survival skill usually by growing up in a family that has addiction or is dysfunctional. We had to predict what was going to happen next.
- ❑ **Black & White Thinking--Rigid Thinking**—Addiction is not about moderation. We have trouble being moderate in most things. It's like the addiction kills all the “*reasonable brain cells*” or “*grey cell*” leaving only the black or the white, the all or the nothing.
- ❑ **Anger**—If there is a feeling that is expressed, it is usually anger. Not having their substance makes them irritable and angry.
- ❑ **Quick Fix Mentality**—Addicts are used to “fixing” their uncomfortable feelings with their addiction. As a result, they expect change to happen fast and have difficulty waiting for things or progress over time. That is one of the reasons relapse is so common is that they are unable to withstand the painful/ uncomfortable feelings that occur with withdrawal.
- ❑ **Ego Boundaries**—Alcoholics and addicts have trouble maintain ego boundaries. They have an inflated sense of self. They feel too responsible for what is going on around them and they have an inordinate sense of influence over others. They feel that they can just talk with someone to make everything right.
- ❑ **Irresponsible and Unmanageable**—Addicts have difficulty managing their lives. They have trouble with procrastination, following through, and avoiding.