



# Fact sheet: Recovery from alcohol

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## Alcohol, the trick drug

Alcohol is a dangerous drug. The fact that it is legal is an accident of history. It has a trick up its sleeve. In small quantities it doesn't seem to cause any harm and may even do some good.

However, in larger quantities, it can be very harmful. At a physical level, it damages brain cells and causes liver problems. Other health problems arise from its overuse. It can also cause severe damage to your wallet.

At a psychological level, it causes breakdown in relationships, damage to the children of alcoholics, guilt, remorse, physical violence and much more.

## When is it a problem?

I like a simple definition. Alcohol is a problem if it creates problems. In other words, if someone is complaining about your drinking, then it is a problem. It's very easy to test if you are a problem drinker. Try going without alcohol for 3 months. If you can't do this easily, then there is a good chance you are a problem drinker.

The term alcoholic is widely used. It means different things to different people. The use of this term helps some people come to terms with their condition. Some people find it helpful to call alcoholism a disease. I would rather call it a condition.



I don't mind what people call it as long as they recognize when their drinking behaviour is a problem and that they then

do something about it.

## Denial

One feature that alcohol abuse shares with other addictions is "denial". People with this problem will play down the amount that they drink and the social and economic effects of their drinking.

The first step to recovery from this addiction is to admit to the problem. Alcoholics Anonymous have this as one of their essential steps.

## How does alcohol work?

Alcohol causes people to become less inhibited (disinhibited). In other words, alcohol is a "drug of permission". When a person has been drinking, they have permission to do things that they can't do when they are sober.

For example, an intoxicated person may gain the permissions to:

- be more confident
- be more emotionally close
- be more angry
- be more friendly
- be less diplomatic and more blunt with what they say
- show off and be the life of the party

The list of examples goes on and on.

## Who is responsible for the inhibition?

We are all made up of many parts (or selves). Some of them are subconscious. When we find ourself doing or saying something that we don't want to do, then this is operated by a subconscious part.

Hal & Sidra Stone, developed the theory of "Voice Dialogue". They called these parts our "Inner Selves".

One of these parts is our "Inner Critic". All of us have an Inner Critic. If our inner Critic is over active, we will feel inhibited, restricted and often have low self esteem. An overactive Inner Critic can lead to a person being a perfectionist which means they are rarely or never satisfied with what they achieve. The Inner Critic can always find fault with something.

If our Inner Critic is under active, we may engage in reckless, careless and risk taking behaviour. Such a person will be described as immature.

Alcohol's trick is to get rid of the Inner Critic. So without the brakes of the Inner Critic on, the intoxicated person is free to take risks. And that is exactly what drunks do.

This drug of permission works well, but when we sober up the Inner Critic comes back with a vengeance giving us a dose of the guilts for what we did the night before.

## There is a better way

The good news is that we can change the way the Inner Critic operates by negotiating with it. We would use the process of Voice Dialogue. The problem drinkers learn to change the permissions run by the Inner Critic much as we would change the permissions on our computer.

As the permissions are changed, the sufferer learns how to do those things they want to do, without the use of alcohol. But because there is no alcohol involved, the sufferer retains his/her judgement. They can be a show off without being a fool. They can be more confident without being over-confident. They learn how to be bold without being irresponsible.

## The Frightened Child

The Frightened Child is the part inside of us who is more frightened than they need to be. This part can play a big role in stopping a person doing what they want to do. Alcohol also squashes the Frightened Child.

We can learn to negotiate with the Frightened Child as well, and teach this part to match its fear to the level of danger that the person is actually facing. Just because the fear feels real, doesn't mean that it is based on reality.

## Win - win

The model that I work with does not involve deprivation by taking the alcohol away, but rather it is replacing alcohol with something that works even better, and doesn't have the side effects!

## Everybody wins

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