

The Dry Drunk Syndrome

“*Dry Drunk*” is a term describing the state of the addict who is uncomfortable when he is using. **The Dry Drunk Syndrome** is a group of symptoms that occur together and constitute an abnormality. Since the abnormality of the addict’s attitudes and behaviors during his/her using career are generally recognized, the persistence of the character traits after the addict stops using might seem equally abnormal. Therefore, the term “*Dry Drunk*” alludes to the addict who is not using. From the lack of change, it is inferred that the addict (male or female) is experiencing discomfort in their lives. The syndrome can occur in all addicts, and there is little doubt as to the source of discomfort.

The phrase “*Dry Drunk*” has two significant words for the addict. “*Dry*” simply refers to the fact that he/she abstains from using, whereas “*Drunk*” signifies a deeply pathological condition resulting from his/her use of chemicals in the past. Taken together, these words suggest intoxication without chemicals. Since intoxication comes from the Greek word of poison, “*Dry Drunk*” implies a state of mind and a mode of behavior that is poisonous to the addict’s well being.

Obvious Traits

Grandiose Behavior is a common trait of the “*Dry Drunk*”. Grandiosity most often manifests itself through lack of insight and pomposity (pompous) in personal behavior. The person undergoing a “dry drunk” may exaggerate his own importance at the expense of others. He/she might overestimate their abilities, intelligence and judgment; or live beyond his/her means. In any case, their behavior is markedly unrealistic, and depending on circumstances, it can range from ridiculous to cruel. By referring everything in his/her self, the addict seems to be unaware of the needs and feelings of other people.

A **Rigidly Judgmental** outlook seems to accompany his/her grandiose behavior. “*Judgmental*” means that the addict is prone to make value judgments strikingly in appropriate evaluations usually in terms of “*goodness*” and “*badness* “. Since he/she is inclined to judge themselves rather harshly in regard to his/her drugging behavior, it is not unusual for others to detect in them deep feelings of personal unworthiness, but they can superficially disguise these feelings by submitting their family, relatives, friends, business associates, and employer to the same rigid system of evaluation that he/she is applying to his/her self. They justifiably feel that they are the least acceptable of critics. This alone is proof enough that their attitude is basically unrealistic, whether or not their judgment reflects some degree of truth.

Tense Impatience describes the addict’s reaction to others, or to life itself. Although this reaction is unrealistic, it relates to his/her desire for immediate satisfaction of their demands. Typically the addict seeks immediate reward for his/her efforts, and immediate release from stress and/or strain. If the sought-after satisfaction is not quickly forthcoming, they reacts by becoming indignant and/or depressed.

Childish Behaviors and attitudes characterize the addict who has shown signs of being impatient, grandiose and/or judgmental. He/she is a child in many respects. They are easily bored, distracted and/or disorganized. They constantly jeopardize their long-range successes by their changing feelings from moment to moment. At any time he/she is likely to pick up their marbles and go home. He/she might be unable to appreciate the aspects of life that mature people enjoy, such as reading, conversation or movies. Their enthusiasm is often juvenile and short-lived. They seem to be constantly dissatisfied with their life.

Unrealistic Behavior is not confined to the addict. A business executive caught in a traffic jam leans on his car horn in a frenzy of irritation, or the housewife who has been miserable every Monday for thirty years because she must do family wash blames the family for getting the clothes dirty. She seems to be maladjusted to her domestic role. Both examples show behavior that is neither realistic nor appropriate to the situation. The self-destructive attitudes and behaviors of the “dry drunk addict” are different in degree but not in kind. During his/her using years, the addict has learned to rely on a deeply inadequate, radically immature approach to solving life’s problems.

He/she is often guilty of rationalizing. By dissipating the criticism of others through makeshift explanations, they attempt to bolster self-esteem. They must justify their self at every turn, however wayward are their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, they find many reasons for avoiding AA and NA, and each reason might be plausible, but their argument attempts to ignore the truth; that they need AA and/or NA, or other help.

The addict who rationalizes about his/her own irresponsible behavior is also likely to find fault in the attitudes and behavior of others. Although not denying their own shortcomings, they attempt to escape notice of them by cataloging in great detail the transgressions of his family, friends, employer and those who are in authority. He/she tries to get off the hook by equating others with themselves, but this is quite transparent. They are not really interested in reform, but in being able to say with some truth, “Look, I am not so different from anyone else.”

The maneuver of projection seems to be quite like rationalization on the surface. By projection, the addict finds in others what is unacceptable in his/her self. This involves great lack of insight whereby he/she attempts to rid themselves of their intolerable feelings and motives by recognizing these feelings in others. He/she might interpret their conduct as motivated by feelings that they unconsciously acknowledges as unworthy in their own attitudes towards themselves. The maneuver of projection might cause them to accuse others of wanting them to get drunk, or they might accuse their AA and NA friends of using. They may also accuse others of suspecting them of using.

Analysis of Dry Drunk Behavior

The addict is obviously uncomfortable with his/her self, but does not know why. They distinctly lack personal insight. Often the discomforts of their past life seem to hover about them and cause present feelings. They strongly disapprove of what society tells them is base, uncontrolled, selfish and disgusting. However, he/she cannot or will not find within themselves the impulse, which governs such behavior. He/she must preserve their self-esteem rather than having to accept reality. They are not successful in their self-deception because they do not recognize in their feelings, impulses, wishes and memories that are acceptable. So, he/she has a conflict between what they dimly perceives to be the truth about their feelings, impulses and wishes, and what their self-esteem allows them to accept as the truth. Since this contradiction is unbearable to his conscious mind, he/she drives it from their consciousness and resorts to various maneuvers to prevent it from coming to light. If the maneuvers are successful in hiding what is unacceptable to the addict's self-esteem, he/she will be unaware that they are performing them.

He/she might make an outright denial of the truth about his/her self Although, he/she might possess all the facts, they will still fail to appreciate their real significance. They overlook the dark implication of a statement like: "Yes, I've been in the AA and/or NA for three years now, and it's really done a lot of good for me," even though he/she has had several relapses.