



# **Your Sibling and Alcohol**

# BROS & SIS

## Your Sibling and Alcohol

Alcohol can be really destructive. It can make your brother or sister aggressive, immature, moody and unpleasant to be around. Here's a bit of information to help you deal with your brother or sister's alcohol problem.

### Some common problems with alcoholism

- Craving - a strong need to drink
- Loss of control - not being able to stop drinking once you've begun
- Physical dependence - withdrawal symptoms, like nausea, sweating or shakiness after stopping drinking
- Tolerance - the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol in order to get drunk

### Questions that might be going through your mind

#### Does my brother or sister have a problem? Signs and symptoms of problematic use

- Drinking is more important than their job, friends and family.
- They become angry when confronted about drinking
- Daily or frequent alcohol consumption to function normally

- Drinking secretly/alone
- Finding excuses to drink
- Poor eating habits
- Difficulty stopping or reducing alcohol consumption
- Memory loss, blackouts
- Morning shakes or drinking early in the morning
- Nausea, vomiting
- Neglecting physical appearance
- Violent episodes that occur when drinking

### How can you best deal with a person who's drunk and confrontational?

When your sibling is intoxicated he/she may be aggressive, violent and unpredictable. They can be completely unreasonable and immature. It's not always easy to know how to handle these situations, especially when you're the centre of their attention. If you do find yourself in this situation, it's important to:

- **Avoid getting into arguments** – this may lead to confrontation (save sibling rivalry for when they're sober!)
- **Use non-threatening words & tone** (avoid possibly offensive words like "drunk")
- **If you notice suicidal thoughts,**

**take them seriously.** Stay with your sibling, talk with them and, if necessary, call for emergency or the suicide help line 1300 651 251.

• **Find an activity to distract them** – television, a computer game, music etc.

• **Offer non-alcoholic drinks and food.** Keep an eye out for any late night, unsupervised cooking (you don't want them to burn down the house!)

• **Don't argue or offer resistance to verbal assault,** use "fogging techniques" – agreeing with the possibility of what the person is saying

• **Be mindful of your own safety** – if it looks like the situation could get dangerous, just get away from your sibling to somewhere safe

### Long-term effects

Alcohol can damage every organ and system in the body. It can also cause social and psychological problems.

Problems can include:

- poor diet
- stomach problems
- frequent infections
- skin problems
- liver and brain damage
- damage to reproductive organs
- memory loss/confusion

- heart and blood disorders
- depression
- relationship problems
- work problems
- money or legal troubles.

### **Why won't he/she stop drinking?**

Your brother or sister could be:

**Physically addicted** – they might hate the withdrawal

**Using it to deal with strong emotions and anxiety** – in the short time

**Using denial** – they may not have much insight into their situation and may blame others for their situation, eg. saying "You're driving me crazy!"

**Living a life built around alcohol** – all their friends might drink as well

### **What are the different types of treatment on offer?**

Treatment may involve one or more of the following:

- Detoxification or 'detox' (removal of alcohol for 3-6 weeks)
- Seeing a psychologist or counsellor
- In-patient treatment
- Medication
- Self-help groups (e.g. alcoholics anonymous)
- Residential or outpatient programs
- For a more in depth review on what these involve, refer to the 'your sibling and treatment' factsheet

### **Are there any medications that can be prescribed for an alcoholic?**

- **Disulfiram** – makes the user very sensitive to the negative effects of alcohol, so they are less likely to want to use it. They must already be wanting to cut down their use, as they can simply stop taking the drug in order to use alcohol again.
- **Naltrexone** – used in management of alcohol dependence
- **Acamprosate** – helps maintain abstinence from alcohol

### **What happens in self-help groups like alcoholics anonymous?**

- **Support and encouragement** – to become or stay drug and alcohol free.
- **Alcohol abstinence programs** – like Alcoholics anonymous' twelve-step programs.
- **Regular meetings** – every day or every week

### **Can I support my sibling at a meeting?**

Yes, non-alcoholics are welcome to attend 'open speaker meetings'.