

Recognizing The Signs Of Problem Drinking

from the American Counseling Association

While there has been growing attention in recent years to issues such as under-age drinking, college binge drinking and drunk driving incidents, for many of us there may be real issues related to alcohol consumption that are more personal and closer to home.

Yet most of us have little awareness of the signs that point to problem drinking, or what to do when such signs begin to appear. Problem drinking, even when it doesn't involve driving incidents (though, unfortunately, it often does), can affect family life, work performance and a variety of other important personal relationships. It can be a major factor that leads to divorce or even life-threatening incidents.

How to tell if alcohol has become a problem for you? It isn't always an easy question to answer if you consider yourself just a social drinker. But try asking yourself the following questions:

- Have you ever awoken in the morning and found you can't remember parts of the previous evening?
- Have people close to you complained about your drinking?
- Do you find it difficult to stop after one or two drinks?
- Have you lost friends because of your drinking?
- Has drinking begun to cause problems between you and your family?
- Has alcohol gotten you into trouble at work or school?
- Do you get into physical fights when you drink?
- Have you lost a job because of drinking?
- Has drinking caused you to neglect family, work or other obligations?
- Have you heard voices or seen things not really there after heavy drinking?

A "yes" answer to any of these questions is a clear indication that you should seek a professional evaluation. A professional counselor can provide such an evaluation. Many counselors specialize in assessing and treating problem drinking.

Your local mental health center or hospital should be able to provide a list of such counselors. Or check your local yellow pages or online for professional counselors certified in addiction counseling.

It can be a big and difficult step to recognize that you may have a drinking problem. And it takes strength to take action to deal with the problem. When problem drinking is recognized early, and professional assistance is sought, it can usually be treated successfully. But when problem drinking is ignored, the outcome is almost always going to be the painful consequences that come with excessive drinking.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org