

Addictions are often ruinous to a marriage.

Adapted from the USCCB web site: For Your Marriage

If you or your spouse in the past month has taken a drink first thing in the morning to help you recover from a hangover you may be dealing with an addiction problem. There are other possible symptoms, as well. For instance, as a person with an alcohol addiction you may have gotten home from a party in one piece, and even though your car went up on the lawn a bit, you were able to park it and get into the house. But if you don't know how that scratch on the rear bumper got there, you are showing addiction symptoms.

You may tell yourself, "It must have been someone else who did that" but this is part of your denial. Maybe you say, "What's the big deal, almost all of my friends are serious drinkers. They drink way more than I ever do." "I have it under control" when talking about drug use or sexual addictions is a rationalization and almost always indicates a problem. If your wife or husband complains about it, you write it off as just so much nagging. If any of this is familiar, or if you or someone close to you thinks you have a problem with alcohol or drugs or sex, most likely you do. If you have a loved one who has this problem you need to get help. Substance abuse and addictions do not disappear; rather, they only get worse when left untreated. Substance abuse and addictions are a major source of marital breakups and family problems. They affect all the members of the family, not just the one abusing or addicted.

Individuals with addictions have a distorted sense of reality. They will justify hiding their addiction from family and friends. They might even explain that they drink or escape through drugs or other behavioral addictions to deal with a spouse who makes life difficult, or because they have a stressful job, or their children are such problems. When their addiction worsens – and it will – they will tell say that the police were unjustified when they got the DUI, or when they suffer other consequences of their abuse, like being "caught", that this really was just a one-time fluke.

In addition to the person with the addiction, there is often a spouse who suffers from co-dependency. One of definitions of co-dependency is a set of maladaptive, compulsive behaviors learned by family members in order to survive in a family which is experiencing great emotional pain and stress. As adults, co-dependent people have a greater tendency to get involved in relationships with people who are unreliable, emotionally unavailable, or needy. A co-dependent person tries to control everything within the relationship- but can't.

The denial that accompanies an addiction is a family problem because it often includes the spouse as well. Spouses may cover up for their partner, make excuses, call in to an employer and say he/she is sick when it is really a hangover. They will overlook the fender bender accident. Most of all they tolerate the lack of physical and emotional availability from their spouse due to their "affair" with their addiction. "Recovery" for co-dependent spouses comes when they eventually address their own needs instead of tolerating mistreatment or trying to rescue their spouse. Whether the addictive behavior is relatively minor or more serious, often it is the co-dependent spouse who starts the recovery process by first addressing his or her own need for

assertiveness plus improving listening and communication skills. Counseling can bring awareness of dysfunctional behaviors, and help the couple develop new, healthier coping skills.

Addictions are often ruinous to a marriage if they are allowed to continue. They are compulsive behaviors that are usually fueled by deeply seated anger or fear of intimacy. Addictions almost always indicate emotional pain. They are often used as a substitute for true intimacy.

Treatment often takes the form of individual, marital, and group therapy. Key tasks for recovery include, first and foremost, breaking through the denial. Sometimes this requires that the co-dependent spouse first break his or her own denial and also learn about the addiction process and how one goes about establishing sobriety. Then it is a matter of getting the addict to start a treatment plan. For many, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or My House groups can be effective solutions. For others these can be the starting point in combination with therapy. [Alcoholics Anonymous](#), known as A.A., and the other 12-Step programs are a great resource. Meetings are held morning, noon and night. Individuals get the support of a sponsor- someone who has gone through the process of recovery and lives their life fully. These people are models of living a life of sobriety. For the spouse of someone with an addiction, as well as for their children, there are [Al-anon](#) and [Narconon](#) meetings. They support, encourage, and help the co-dependent spouse to stop the ways that he or she may have inadvertently been enabling the addicted person. Sometimes it is necessary to create an intervention. This is done with professional help and with a well thought out treatment plan. Couple therapy is also an essential part of recovery. A spouse may not be able to recognize the need for his or her involvement, but recovery is much more successful when both spouses are involved. If the addicted person attends A.A., and the spouse possibly attends Al-anon meetings, plus they receive marriage counseling, the marital relationship is more likely to stabilize and the couple can work through the trauma they experienced from the addicted partner's behaviors. There is also [Retrouvaille](#), a program for married couples who are hurting. It is not specifically for addictions, but it does assist any couple that has experienced a major disillusionment.

With addictions comes the need for reconciliation and forgiveness for the damage caused in the marriage. With help, hard work, and the right kind of support, many couples are able to heal their marriage and create a new and healthier marital life- something they could not have imagined while in the midst of their crisis. With time, patience, and persistence trust can be restored and a new level of intimacy reached. By moving beyond the initial denial and earnestly working each recovery step, a couple can heal and reclaim a life a sobriety from addictive behaviors.