

## Challenges and Treatment of Substance Abuse

by John Muldoon, PhD, LPC



My name is John Muldoon. I am a new therapist at Meredith O'Brien & Associates, LLC. I have extensive clinical experience in both the areas of substance abuse and domestic violence. I was a former university professor and had the privilege to teach and to supervise graduate students. In addition to my doctorate in counselor education, I am a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Certified Addictions Counselor and an Approved Clinical Supervisor. My passion is counseling people who have substance use and abuse issues. One thing I have learned, among others, is the effect that problematic substance use has on individuals, family members, and others around the individual.

In my master's program, I researched individuals, including adolescents, with substance abuse and dependence issues. I began exploring the effects of addiction on significant others and children. I learned about Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse's experiences on counseling families and children of alcoholics.



l to r: Barbara Tatum, LPC, Meredith O'Brien, LCSW (founder), Jessica Lupon, LPC

Her research on family roles (dependent, co-dependent, hero, scapegoat, mascot, and lost child) in an alcoholic family were quite relevant with the individuals and families I was counseling. Claudia Black's rules (don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel) also connected with family members. An individual's statement that his or her use does not affect anyone else became quite the myth.

Statistically speaking, 26.9% of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking (men - 5 drinks in two hours; women - 4 drinks in two hours) in the past month. Seven percent reported that they engaged in heavy alcohol use in the past month, where heavy alcohol use is defined as binge drinking on five or more days in the past month (The National Institute of Health, 2015). The American Society of Addiction Management reported that 2 million people had a substance use disorder involving prescription pain relievers and 591,000 had a substance use disorder involving heroin. In addition, 259 million opioid prescriptions were written in 2012; that is more than enough to give every American adult a bottle of pills.

So, what do we do about substance addiction? It seems there are two main objectives beyond making treatment accessible to people who generally do not believe they have a substance problem, who are not interested in treatment, and/or who do not want to decrease or stop using. One avenue is to provide education because there are many myths about addiction including that one has to drink/use daily. The second is to collaboratively develop and continually evaluate a plan that provides the direction for treatment. Obstacles will occur for most clients, usually in the form of defenses. It is important for a well-trained addictions counselor to understand, recognize, and challenge the subtle and not so subtle thoughts and behaviors that make progress in counseling challenging.

I continue to be fascinated with addictions counseling. The process is different for each individual. It is important to explore the individual and family dynamics and to acknowledge and to validate the impact addiction has on the family unit. If you or a loved one is suffering with addiction please contact our practice.

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