

Levels of Use script 3-4-13 Length 15:30

Tony "I can't sit there and tell you...well, hey, because the courts found you guilty or something and you're here...you're an alcoholic. That's something that you're going to have to determine on your own."

Levels of Use

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When a driver is processed for a DUI, an assessment is subsequently made of that person's dependence on alcohol or other drugs.

Kathryn "Yes, I'm obviously just not a social drinker because, I mean, a social drinker, something like this wouldn't happen."

Assessment Session Client: "Yeah, last time I drank was when I blacked out and wound up in jail for my DUI."

The reason for this assessment is to determine whether driving under the influence was a one-time thing and needs limited intervention or is only one of many such incidents and the person should be enrolled in extensive treatment for their drug and alcohol dependence.

Drug/Alcohol Counselor "Has it ever concerned you when you have driven under the influence?
Client: "No, I tend to drive better , I think. I do, I don't seem to have a problem. Well, there was that one time."

Often there is disagreement about the diagnosis.

Greg "At the alcohol assessment, I was diagnosed with a significant problem, which of course I disagreed with. 'You know, I don't have a problem. I'm not addicted. I don't need to go through this.' And so I fought it for quite awhile, not wanting to be at the facility, not wanting to do one on ones, not wanting to speak to anybody, let alone a group such as AA or treatment groups or things like that."

One of the factors used in the initial assessment is the blood-alcohol concentration or BAC at the time of the stop, determined through a breath test. Later, a urine or blood test can be used and occasionally a saliva or hair test. These tests can look for other drugs as well as alcohol.

The BAC is also used to determine the severity of the fines and punishment: will it be a handful of DUI classes or extensive treatment for addiction. A .08 blood alcohol level or BAC, is the cutoff point. Above that level, one is considered legally intoxicated and can automatically be charged with a DUI.

Darin "And the officer came and it didn't even dawn on me...you know, he asked me if I'd been drinking and I just said, 'yeah.' And then it hit me....'oh my God...here we go"

A person can receive a DUI even if they are below a .08 if they can't do the tests properly.

Prosecuting Attorney "Currently the American Medical Association has a resolution out that says they think that the level of impairment should be 0.04, half of the legal level in most states...in all states.

For a 150 pound man to reach .08 BAC on average requires 3 standard drinks in one hour or 4 standard drinks in 2 hours.

A standard drink contains 0.6 ounces of pure alcohol whether it is a shot of hard liquor, a 5 ounce glass of wine, or a 12 ounce bottle of beer.

DUI Class Counselor "Too many people would come in and when I do assessments with them, they'd say, 'I only had the 1 or 2 drinks' and they blow a 0.14. That's not possible when one would go by what a standard drink is. Their drinks were 2 Long Island ice teas, which have, you know, 10 ounces of alcohol total in it."

The average BAC of those stopped for drunk driving is .16, twice the legal limit and in many states the trigger point for more severe penalties.

To reach .16 BAC for a 150 pound man requires 6 standard drinks in one hour, 7 drinks in 2 hours.

For a 150 pound woman, it requires 1 less drink to reach these levels because they metabolize alcohol differently from men.

Greg "I think the judge was not very impressed with the 0.24 BAC and she set \$1000 bail and sent me right on back to the room.

Darin "Oh my second was probably a .27 and a .29 is what I blew. My third, I blew a .33."

Although many states assume that a person has an alcohol or drug drinking problem if they get a DUI, it is valuable to examine the criteria used to define a level of use.

The 6 levels of drug use are abstention, experimentation, social use, habituation, abuse and addiction.

Abstention

Abstention means the person has never used alcohol or a drug, is on parole or probation and prohibited from drinking, or is in recovery and has chosen not to.

Ryan: "I don't drink at all. I don't smoke anymore. I've learned that...I don't look down upon it. I look at it as...'I can't believe it's still legal.'"

Experimentation

Kai "My sister's, my older sister's boyfriends, they would give me alcohol and stuff cause I was young, probably 8, 9 years old."

With experimentation, people become curious about alcohol and drugs and will use occasionally when it becomes available but there is no established pattern of use and there are only limited negative consequences except if too much is consumed, leading to a DUI, accident, medical problem, or overdose. If the user is genetically and environmentally vulnerable, they can accelerate from experimentation to addiction more quickly than others.

"My drinking started as a kid, you know, getting sips off of dad's stuff and then it went into living with my mother in poverty and being around a lot of drugs and shootings and stuff like that as a kid, but my main goal was to collect bottles to go, at 9 years old, so we could get a bottle of MD 20/20."

Social Use

With social use, the person seeks out a known drug to experience a known effect, but no habitual pattern has been established, but as with experimentation, overuse can have consequences.

"Most of my friends drink. I have friends that don't drink. More of just social drinker with them. Going fishing and drinking, that type of thing."

"A lot of the drinking was social, needing it to be social to instigate conversations, to be a fun person, be a funny person, be a confident person."

Habituation

With habituation, there is a definite pattern of use: the cocktail or three after work or the 5 espressos, every day. As long as there aren't really negative consequences it can be considered habituation.

Tom "Usually after work, what I do is I come home and take my uniform off and get into my civilian clothes and go out back and start drinking beer and smoking cigarettes and playing darts is what I usually do. And I do it every day."

Greg "With a bar and a restaurant, everybody gathers after work and has a few shifts drinks and moves over to the next bar down the street, driving down there, and then either driving to the next one or driving to a friend's house or driving home. And that just, I believe, escalated into a habitual thing."

Ryan "It's habit. You know. We're all based on habit. You know, you do it once you get into a routine it's very hard to step out of that. That goes along with your thought process. You know, you have to constantly think about it."

Abuse

Abuse is defined as the continued use of a drug in spite of negative consequences, such as smoking cigarettes in spite of chronic obstructive airway disease, using meth in spite of high blood pressure, gambling in spite of large debt problems, and driving numerous times with a .08 BAC or higher.

Steve “I didn’t drink every day. I was a binge drinker. But when I drank, I drank and it caused problems. I didn’t know it was a disease. I just thought it was something I couldn’t do. I can remember sitting at a bar one time, looking at a glass and thinking, ‘wow, this is just another thing I can’t do.’”

Many DUI arrestees have not crossed the line into addiction.

DUI Class Instructor “We really don’t have any real true signs of alcoholic dependence addiction. They may have signs of alcohol abuse because of the drinking and driving. But most of them are casual drinkers, social drinkers that have gone out and just kind of made a mistake and didn’t know through ignorance or just went out and had one too many good times.”

Marquis “Most of the time I just felt like I was going to have a couple of drinks and that was it, but there’s plenty of nights where there could be someone there buying you drinks and you’re just having a good time and you get to a certain point where you bought one too many and now you don’t care anymore.”

ADDICTION

The step between abuse and addiction has to do with compulsion. People who cross this line can’t stop once started and have lost control of their drug use.

Ryan “You never have enough. But, you’re never smart enough to go to the store and buy...you know, you don’t think. ‘Oh, I’m going to drink 45 beers tonight or I’m going to drink two 30-packs cause I’m going to have one friend come over. You know, nobody thinks like that. They go, an 18-pack, that’ll be good. You know, and then 18-pack goes by like that and now it’s paper, rock, scissors to see which one’s driving. You know, and it’s usually the one that is more drunk. Usually a guy like, ‘Oh, I’ll drive, I’m fine.’”

DUI Class Instructor “It is not an exact science, ok? When somebody actually crosses over to addiction, I don’t think science knows exactly when that is. And I talk about this. I’m a cucumber, I’m a cucumber, I’m a cucumber, I’m a pickle! And once you’re a pickle, you ain’t going back to being a cucumber again. Ok? And so when they look at it that way, there’s no return. There becomes a physical need to have that drug.”

The actual effects depend on your body’s sensitivity to alcohol, its health, and how quickly you drink.

Steve “I never learned how to drink right, yeah! I never, never quite got that down. I practiced a lot though.”

Chester “My normal thing every night was take a two quart thermos, one quart of coffee, one quart of Bailey’s to make it through the night. That was my standard take to work, you know, keep the alcohol level high enough to where I could function.”

Kim “I had no stopping point. I would stop at a liquor store right when I got off work or take alcohol from my job. And I was usually intoxicated by the time I got home. I didn’t have a reason. I didn’t need a reason to drink. It was what I did. “

It is important to know that the disease, or condition, or allergy, or whatever you want to call it is addiction . . . it’s not alcoholism or morphinism, or marijuana dependence. Those are the symptomatic expressions of the basic condition and the daily obsession with using.

Darin “I’m highly addicted. I have an addictive personality. I have to watch anything that I do. It’s not just alcohol and drugs. It’s women. It’s addiction to anything, hobbies. I got addicted to hunting. I was always drunk when I was hunting . . . very dangerous. You don’t make wise decisions.”

Chris “I was definitely...I was a daily user. In the end I was using probably about an 8 ball a day. You know, if I didn’t have it, I wouldn’t get out of bed. I wouldn’t take care of my child. I never...up until the point that I got clean and I went to treatment, I never really had a relationship with my child.”

“I am a full blown legit alcoholic. I have a disease. Does it make me a bad person? But the bottom line is...I’ve got it and I make bad decisions when I’m on it. I’ve written this play over and over and over. I know how it ends.”

Addiction is a progressive disease and as long as a person continues to use more and more, the loss of control grows.

DUI Class Instructor “And they look inside themselves and they can make that decision whether they do have a problem or not. I mean we can teach them what alcohol dependence is. We can teach them what alcohol abuse is but for them to internalize that and say, ‘Yeah I’m an alcoholic,’ is not easy. That’s a big step for somebody to make.”

Tilman “The last stretch of alcoholism, you know being at the last stage, which I wouldn’t admit, you know, to myself....but when I was locked up, there were snakes coming out of the walls. I mean stuff that I didn’t think would ever happen to me and I wasn’t a late stage alcoholic.”

Tony “You know, like we said, ‘You are here for a reason. Get something out of it because it just gets worse and worse and worse, you know. It’s not going to get any better. It’s not going to go away,’ but the bottom line is if you can learn from this mistake, you never have to go through it again.”

Stephen “ I either would have changed or I would have died. I mean, the last several times I drank and wound up in the hospital in the DTs, the doctor said, ‘Now if you drink again, you maybe have a week,’ but that didn’t stop me.” (Three months after filming this interview, Stephen died.)

CREDITS