



When people first begin using alcohol or drugs, they may at first experience pleasure and relaxation. It can even seem to some of these individuals like they have found the perfect solution to all of life's problems. These substances can make life easier in the beginning.

They give shy people the courage to socialize and allow a temporary reprieve from the stresses of life.

As the individual uses these substances more and more, their life starts to deteriorate. It might take them

some time to realise it, but they are now trapped in a downward spiral. An addict once described this situation with the words alcohol gave me wings but then took away the sky. Unless people manage to escape their addiction, their ultimate destination is insanity or even death. The longer they delay their escape, the more they will lose along the way.

Addiction Downward Spiral Defined

A downward spiral describes a situation where something deteriorates over time. The addiction downward spiral highlights the reality that, once people become addicted, their life will tend to become

increasingly intolerable. The longer their addiction lasts, the higher the price they will have to pay.

Implied

within the idea of the downward spiral is the understanding that the individual will be unable to escape

their decent unless they give up the addiction.

They may have good days and bad days along the way, but their life will exhibit obvious signs of deterioration over time.

Addicts tend to follow a general downward pattern with their addiction. This is not to say that they will follow the pattern exactly, but they will often pass through the following stages:

The individual is first introduced to alcohol or drugs because of experimentation. There may be a bit of peer pressure to push them into trying these substances. They might just be curious to find out what the fuss is about alcohol or drugs.

If the individual enjoyed his first experimental encounters with alcohol and drugs, they will want to continue using them. They become a regular user. At this stage they might be getting plenty of enjoyment from this activity without too many unwanted side effects. Most people who use alcohol will never go beyond this stage. There are also drug users who remain at this level of usage.

If a regular user is not careful, they can slide into the risky use of alcohol and drugs. They just make a few poor decisions and become more reliant on these substances. Such people may have too much pressure in their life and they will turn to these chemicals as a way to escape the discomfort. The next step in the downward spiral is mental dependence on the drug. The individual will feel unable to cope if they do not have enough of their substance to get them through the day. The next stage of the downward spiral is addiction. They become physically and psychologically dependent on the substance. This means that they have developed a tolerance for the drug. If they try to stop, they will experience withdrawals. The individual will continue in their addiction until they die or hit rock bottom and quit.

The Costs of the Downward Spiral

The longer that people remain addicted the more they are likely to lose. The downward spiral can rob the addict of much of what they value in life including:

Physical health: Alcohol and drugs ravage the organs of the body. Health is further damaged because most addicts do not take care of themselves properly.

Mental health: The downward spiral can drive the individual into deepest insanity and depression.

Relationships: The addict not only destroys their own life but also the lives of the people who are close to them. Removing the addict from their life can be the only way that some people are able to avoid this destruction.

Finance: Addiction is a huge drain on financial resources. To make matters worse, the individual will often struggle to find stable employment.

Self respect: Alcoholism and drug abuse takes people to incredible lows in life. It drains away their self-respect and confidence.

Hope: Eventually addiction will take away the individuals feelings of hope about the future.

They reach a stage where they realize that things are never going to get any better. They may also feel pessimistic about their chances of escaping addiction. When people lose hope, it can put them on the fast track for death.

Functioning Addicts

Not every addict will follow the typical pattern of the downward spiral. The life will still be deteriorating over time, but it can be far less noticeable to other people. The functional alcoholic or addict is able to build an outwardly successful life even though they are struggling with addiction. They will manage to do this because of their drive for success and the constraints this life puts on their substance abuse.

This person will have plenty of money to spend on their addiction, and they can easily explain away their excesses as just letting off steam. So long as they remain successful, other people will be willing to put up with their behavior.

The functioning addict can suffer greatly because they may feel that they have too much to lose by admitting they have a problem.

Hitting Rock Bottom

The way that people escape the downward spiral of their addiction is by hitting their rock bottom. This is

the point where the individual has lost enough because of their addiction that they become unwilling to

lose any more. There is a misconception that addicts need to lose everything in order to hit rock bottom,

but this is not the case.

Some people will have a high rock bottom where they lose very little before becoming willing to end their

addiction. The sooner the individual becomes ready to escape the downward spiral, the better it will

be for them. If they insist on riding all the way to the bottom then all they will find there is death.

Recovering from an Addiction

It is possible to think about the downward spiral into addiction as passing through different stages. The same can also be said of recovery. The usual phases that lead people to sobriety include:

The individual is able to see past denial and acknowledge that they have a problem. They make the decision to escape the misery of their current circumstances. Next they will usually investigate recovery options. They will not take concrete action to end their addiction. They might enter rehab or just give up by themselves.

The individual will no need to go through a period of detoxification from the addictive substance. They are likely to suffer withdrawals as this process takes place. Once the individual has made it through the withdrawals they are ready for early recovery. They begin to develop ways for dealing with life without alcohol or drugs.

Recovery is a process and not an event. Recovery maintenance is a stage that the individual will never really graduate from. After about five years of sobriety things should become easier. If the individual keeps on developing in recovery they may reach a stage known as serenity. This is where they experience a sense of peace and happiness most of the time.

The Downward Spiral in Reality

Addicts can appear skeptical when they first hear about the downward spiral. They will claim that they have good days as well as bad days in addiction. This is a misunderstanding of what is meant by the downward spiral. It describes something that happens over the course of an addiction. There may well be good days and bad days but the general direction of the life of the addict will be downwards. This deterioration can happen so slowly that the individual is now aware of it. It is only when they compare their life now to how it was a few months or years back that they can more clearly see their descent. If the individual is experiencing substantial denial, they might not be able to admit to any deterioration in life because of their addiction. They will blame any problems on other factors in their environment and continue to see chemicals as their savior.