

# Alcohol Abuse

## Why Do I Drink Too Much?

Part II of a three-part series

Why are we so frequently witness to the highly destructive effects of alcohol abuse here on the reservation? And why does the sadness and all too often tragic result of this problem touch the lives of so many here?

It's hard not to be aware of the high number of accidents and acts of violence attributed to the excessive use of alcohol, particularly on weekends, and we know that half the deaths among tribal members last year were related to alcohol abuse.

Theories which attempt to explain some of the reasons Indians across the nation tend to drink to excess are numerous, and the subject is one which produces a variety of opinion and very little agreement.

Among the reasons cited are negative self-image, boredom, frustration, anger, and identity loss.

The staff of the Warm Springs Alcohol Program has offered some of their findings as to the probable causes of alcoholism and problem drinking here on the reservation. Some of the following have been identified:

### INADEQUATE HOUSING

Due to the shortage of housing on this reservation, many households contain more than one family. Generally, newly married family members or transient families move in with relatives. When there is more than one family in a house, often the pressures of limited space and privacy are immense.

Often the attitude of "what's the use" or "I've just got to get away from here" will trigger prolonged or abusive use of alcohol or other drugs.

Parents sometimes want to keep newlywed sons or daughters in the home and as a result, tend to have negative input into the new marriage. In many cases this helps put the marriage on the rocks, causing the young people to look for comfort in drugs or alcohol.

In homes where drinking is the accepted behavior, it is available to all members of the household including children. We see very young children being given beer or wine in baby bottles. We also see preteen and teenagers of permissive households at parties just as loaded as the adults.

Usually the result of too many families in one home, no one assumes responsibility for discipline or management. When financial strain is felt, and is on one person in a multi-family household, the rebellion that takes place is nearly always alcohol.

### MARRIAGE AND FAMILY FAILURE

The courts have indicated that at least two-thirds of their divorce and juvenile delinquency cases are associated with alcoholism in a family member. Communication breakdowns due to family separation are too many times a direct result of alcohol abuse. Again inadequate housing can be a factor.

Another contributing instrument is modern technology in the form of television and stereos. Parents, especially drinking parents, rely on television sets

as babysitters. It's easy to tell a child, "Don't bother me now, go watch T.V."

### SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Social standards set by this society have accepted the use of alcohol as a part of modern American culture. Social gatherings usually include a "Cocktail Hour". Parties and dances, dining out, picnics, dates, all seem to call for "a few to loosen up with." Too often, the party itself is a drinking excuse.

The social structure of this culture allows time and provides places for permissive drinking attitudes to be formed, to the point of openly advertising this attitude in all media for young and old to see.

given to each individual from significant persons in the early years of life. It can be parents, relatives, or any provider of knowledge at this state of learning.

### PEER PRESSURE

Young people are most often faced with this problem. To be part of the "in crowd" he either drinks or takes dope with his peers or he is abandoned by his friends. Every age group has a similar situation. Sometimes when a person tries to sober up, friends or family harrass him with "you must be sick, what's matter, too good to drink with me? Oh, come one, one little drink won't hurt." Many forms of put-downs may be used.

### FAILURE SYNDROME

Causation: The fear of success is a high probable cause of alcoholism and problem drinking here. When a person succeeds in any situation, he may feel that more will be expected of him, making failure a comfort zone. Most problem drinkers feel that they are useless, unnecessary humans who have very limited talent to offer and that it is easier to give up rather than reach for a goal.

Many set unrealistic goals to avoid success by setting a type of life pattern of "failure backing up failure." Explanations no longer need to be made and failure has become expected.

This is a major behavior pattern the Alcohol Program

### POOR SELF-IMAGE

Excessive drinking among Indians is sometimes related to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in relating to non-Indian society, particularly to the dominant society. Indians' uncertainty in relating to white people is a development which has helped create a poor self-image, particularly among male Indians.

The female Indian, often because of her male counterpart, has taken the position of defeat early in adult life. She is taught to guide her life head-down in social situations and that her rightful place is ten paces behind her husband who, in reality, may be ten paces behind everyone else. Drinking enforces the negative self-image, especially when she sees her mate in the role of the "poor drunken Indian."

These are only some of the known causes of alcoholism among a large segment of the Indian people in this community. There are numerous psychological and physiological reasons behind alcohol and drug abuse, some of which are based on mental health problems developed during childhood or in early adult life.

Whatever the cause, if you feel you have a problem, Alcohol Treatment Counselor Billie Jo McConville suggests you seek help. Says McConville, "The Warm Springs Alcohol Treatment Center has been available to this community for about eight years. Going to this helping agency isn't a shame, as some seem to think. It isn't going to ruin your reputation, that is if you had one that could suffer further damage. The shame is that you would rather be seen staggering in and out of taverns or parties or jail than to reach out for help with your drinking problems. Give yourself a break. Call 553-1161 Ext. 205 or 553-1417. Or just come in, you sure are welcome."

NEXT: Booze & The Brain



Television commercials show healthy, robust young men and women in drinking situations. Billboards, newspaper and magazine ads are constantly reaching out to the public, and radio and television commercials play catchy little songs advocating booze.

It is the responsibility of parents to prepare their children for life in a predominately drinking society. This involves teaching and conveying healthy attitudes regarding alcohol, its proper use and potential for misuse. In order to prepare children to make responsible decisions about whether or not to drink or how and why alcohol is to be used, parents need to acquire factual knowledge about alcohol. They should be consistent in teaching and set a good example regarding alcohol use. Only then will young people be equipped to make their own responsible decisions about drinking.

### ENVIRONMENT

Learned behavior and patterning oneself after an admired person is a factor. When a child sees a parent or other relative drinking every day or every weekend, it becomes "okay" in his learning years. If this is a normal sight it becomes a normal life pattern for the child. A child's life patterns are formed between the ages of one and five.

Attitude, behavior and social structure is based on what is

One of the strongest pressure groups is the drinking peers. It is very likely that unless one continues to drink with them and be a partner, brother, buddy, friend indeed, he will be exiled from the group.

The drinking group becomes extremely suspicious of a member who suddenly sobers up. Thoughts of why is he not drinking usually carry heavy paranoia. "Will he take advantage of me? What's he trying to prove? Is he going to be better than me?" These are questions a drinking group would rather not face, so rejection of the rebel takes place.

### LONELINESS AND BOREDOM

Indian people both on and off reservations are many times faced with loneliness and boredom (when I am lonely, I look for company-when I am bored I look for something to do). In a tavern or bar, there is a "comraderie" that serves as a substitute for real friendship or companionship.

It is a comraderie, true or false, that some cannot or are unable to find elsewhere. The bar is a place where "Indians stick together", sharing and caring. Here, everyone is relative to one another. And there are psuedo brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles who, in their loneliness, willingly claim everyone and anyone to make life bearable in an unbearable situation.

looks at in setting up individually tailored programs for each client. The object is to help the person gain a positive attitude toward self and then set a realistic growth goal. In this way each person allows himself to make decisions in all phases of his recovery, knowing finally that he is a valuable human, responsible for success and growth of self.

## Program Services Available

**Total Awareness:** Sensitivity and awareness groups, Reality Therapy, Gestalt, role playing, paraphrasing, relaxation exercises, all forms of soft and hard "touch" therapy (trust circle, trust walk).. Tues. and Fri., 4 p.m.

**Alcohol Education:** This class includes lectures, films, guests, speakers on psychological and physiological effects of alcohol on the human body, nutrition in recovery, law and consequences due to alcohol related offenses, behavior modification, goals and objectives of a recovering alcoholic. (Tuesday - 9:30 a.m.).

**Indian Is:** This class is about alcoholism in relationship with being an Indian, cultural insight, affirmations, cultural acceptance-rejection. (Mon.-Wed.-Fri. - 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.).

**Assertive Training:** Taken from Manuel Smith's book "When I say No I Feel Guilty", and Lynn Z. Bloom, Karen Coburn, Joan Pearlman's book "The New Assertive Woman". (Mon and Wed. - 4 p.m.).

**Arts and Crafts-Culture and Heritage:** The intent here is to provide at least an idea of some background information on the use of Arts and Crafts in Warm Springs Alcohol Program. Literature on the use of Art Therapy in rehabilitation exists but is limited.

**Art Therapy** is practiced in an Alcohol Program in Cleveland, Ohio, as well as here. The productions, whatever their nature serves as a means of emotional catharsis and as vehicles for revealing inner problems and fears. Culture and Heritage Classes are classes to give our people a better insight to the foundation of the spiritual aspect of Indian existence, background, and living situations. (Mon., Tues., Wed., Fri., - 2:30-4 p.m., Sat. 3 to 6 p.m.).