

Addressing Alcohol Use—and Abuse

The request for another “cold one” or a “double shot on the rocks” often walks the line between a socially acceptable behavior and the solitary attempt to ease the burden of the ongoing stress in our lives. It becomes even more complicated when issues of age, motivation, and circumstance come into play. And the presumed innocence of just having a drink or two—for some people—can be betrayed by genetic, social, and psychological factors that can be devastating.

Many people drink responsibly and carefully. But for some the use of alcohol can become an entry point to personal and family dysfunction. Its effect can be as minor as an irritating hangover—or as traumatic as living with auto fatalities, job loss, domestic abuse, and serious illness that is alcoholism.

As the U.S. government, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), and other groups educate about alcohol abuse, some would wonder why the church should address this issue. After all, Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Martin Luther’s wife brewed beer. Yet the church can help speak to the issue in a different way, to help people think about the choices they make in their daily lives, and how these choices affect their spiritual lives.

The question isn’t just about bottles of booze consumed. Author Harry Austryn once said, “We often mistake a desire of the body as a yearning for the soul.” Our challenge as a church is in interpreting faith for the sake of everyday discipleship. The range of this ministry includes an awareness of the need to teach healthy decision-making, conflict resolution, and building community as we inspire and equip people of all ages to live a lifestyle that is “Christ’s style.”

Ways to Help

- Acknowledge and address real-life issues in proactive ways. Include alcohol use among your topics for small-group study among children, youth, and adults. Focus on the reality of alcohol abuse in our culture. Help members nurture a sense of faithful integrity as they encounter people and activities associated with alcohol use.
- Devote time to nurturing skills for effective communication, conflict resolution, stress management and decision-making. Invite members to consider criteria for making healthy lifestyle choices, and be aware of the realities of peer pressure at any age and the positive and negative consequences involved.
- Explore models for meditation and discernment about personal lifestyle choices and how they reflect our values.
- Discourage the use of alcohol and other substances as an option for easing the stress and coping with life’s challenges.
- Uphold and care for those who are alcoholics, fully aware that no one takes the first drink with the intent to become addicted. Give them the same “come-as-you-are” grace and support them as you do anyone else who strives to grow within your faith community.
- Provide ready access to organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, which provide specific support for alcoholics and their families.
- Include prayers for those dealing with alcoholism and other addictions.
- Plan family and intergenerational opportunities for people to talk about real-life issues from a faith perspective. Especially help youth realize the dangers of alcohol consumption as it pertains to choices about sexual behavior and other drug experimentation.
- Nurture self-esteem as a God-given gift to manage the stewardship of who we are as children of God, called to reflect God’s love and grace in the world.

Resources

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Web site www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
- Check out www.augsburgfortress.org for *Choices* in the Ministry to Adolescence Program (ISBN 0-8591-0804-X) and *Smart Choices* (ISBN 0-8066-3722-6) from the Intersections Small Group Series.
- Also *The Heart of Addiction: A New Approach to Understanding & Managing Alcoholism and other Addictive Behaviors* (ISBN 0-0609-5803-0) at bookstores.
- You'll find a variety of resources for children, youth, and adults at www.hazelden.org

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