

**What is the best way for an individual to determine if they are an "addict" or simply a drug user. In other words, where is the line crossed?**

Since the 1960's and 70's most addiction therapists have worked from various forms of essentially the same definition of an addict and three main components stand out: 1) compulsion, 2) lack of control, and 3) continuation despite the consequences. When you have all three of these ingredients present, you are addicted to something.

Compulsion means there is the urge present and it rarely goes away. A lack of control means that you want to stop and perhaps even recognize that it is not in your best interest to continue, but you do it anyway. Perhaps the third element is the most telling in that despite what others have said to you and notwithstanding the personal knowledge you have that this is not in my best interest – you continue to use.

Even with this definition there is often a problematic line between abuse and addiction. The transition between the two rarely happens quickly. It is true that abusers run the high risk and almost certainly over time graduate to addicts; however, the matter is rarely ever black or white. The choice of drugs also complicates the definition.

Most abusers begin with a starting phase in which they are abusing occasionally because of the pleasure associated with experience. Over time; however, a person is no longer motivated by the pleasure alone and they transition to a preservation phase of their addiction. The use simply removes the discomfort from when the substance (whatever it is) is not present.

So my dear reader, the line is crossed when the preservation phase of addiction sets in; meaning all three elements mentioned above are now present. Addiction is evident because the person can no longer control when they start and when they stop. During this journey (between the two phases) and afterwards there is usually a long progressive deterioration of social, economic and health functions.

In my 20 years as a counselor, I have had many users of drugs and alcohol tell me something to the effect, "I can take it or leave it." It has been my experience, when a person says that, they are almost certainly taking it!

-Dr. Patrick Chapman, Ripley, Mississippi.