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Moderation or Abstinence? A Research-based Checklist for Client Self-Assessment

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Community surveys of those experiencing AOD problems identify the following reasons cited for not seeking professional treatment: reluctance to give up the drug, reluctance to admit the need for help, perception that problem is not severe enough to warrant treatment, perception that the problem could be managed by oneself without professional help, lack of knowledge about treatment, inability to afford treatment, or opinion that treatment would not be helpful (Cunningham, Sobell, Sobell, Agrawal, & Toneatto, 1993; Grant, 1997; Tucker et al., 2004). These studies underscore the larger portion of people experiencing AOD problems who are trying to decide if they need to completely stop using or whether they could successfully cut down their use. The strategy of wanting to cut down drinking and control drinking situations is a common pattern among DUI offenders. Rather than challenge this latter strategy as a long-term solution, it may be helpful to acknowledge what we know from scientific studies about such problems.

1. Many people resolve these problems on their own without professional

- treatment (Cunningham et al., 1995; Burman, 1997; Timko et al, 1999).
2. These self-resolution strategies included both abstinence and moderation approaches (Cahalan & Roizen, 1975; Dawson, 1996).
3. The ability to resolve problems without professional help and through a strategy of moderation is dependent on several characteristics related to personal vulnerability, problem severity and problem complexity (Sobell et al., 1996; Larimer & Kilmer, 2000).

The following instrument can be used in an interview format or given as an instrument to be completed by the client and then reviewed with the professional helper. The instrument is constructed such that each "Yes" response indicates a greater potential for substance use problems of greater duration and severity. The instrument also includes risk factors for DUI recidivism.

Moderation or Abstinence? Which is best for me?

Nearly everyone who encounters an alcohol or other drug problem confronts the question of whether that problem can be resolved by altering when, where and how one uses these substances or whether those problems can only be resolved by stopping alcohol and drug use completely and forever. Recent research studies are helping determine who can and who cannot achieve a moderate relationship with alcohol and other drugs. The following questions are designed to help you determine whether a moderation or abstinence goal would work best for you. Answer each question as honestly as you can by placing a check mark under either the Yes or No categories.

YES NO

1. There is a history of alcohol and other drug problems in my family.
2. I began regular alcohol or other drug use (outside of family/religious ritual) before age 15.
3. I have a history of severe emotional trauma and/or emotional problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.).
4. I consume more than 15 standard alcoholic drinks (a drink is defined as a 12 ounce can of beer, 4 ounce glass of wine, a cocktail with 1 ounce of distilled alcohol) per week.
5. I am pregnant or trying to get pregnant.
6. I have a medical condition that could be worsened by my consumption of alcohol.
7. I have been encouraged by a doctor to stop drinking.
8. I have experienced at least 3 of the following:
 - a. ___ high tolerance alcohol/drugs
 - b. ___ physical/emotional distress when I stopped using
 - c. ___ morning use
 - d. ___ craving for alcohol/drugs
 - e. ___ frequent memory loss while using

- f. ___ continued use in spite of adverse consequences
9. I have done things under the influence of alcohol/drugs that could have led to injury or death to myself or others.
10. Most of my close friends use alcohol and other drugs regularly (4 or more days a week) and heavily (more than 4 drinks per day) and encourage me to use in a similar manner.
11. I have in the past or currently smoke more than 30 cigarettes a day.
12. In the past five years, the longest period I have gone without consuming any alcohol/drugs is less than 30 days.
13. I can drive better than most people after I have been drinking.
14. It is okay to drink and drive as long as you drive carefully.
15. People have told me that I have a different personality when I am drinking.
16. When I drink, I have a tendency to do things that create problems for me.
17. In the past two years, I have failed to keep my promises and resolutions to myself and others to cut down or stop drinking and/or drug use.
18. When I stop drinking for a while, I tend to drink heavily when I resume drinking.
19. I have sometimes thought I might be losing my mind while I was drinking.
20. I am currently under an occupationally or legally mandated requirement not to drink.

Enter the number of YES responses under My Risk Factor Score below. The person administering this test will help you interpret your risk factor score.

Total Possible Risk Factor Score 20
My Risk Factor Score ___

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