

Alcoholism and Marriage: How Wishful Thinking About Alcohol Abuse Can Impact Your Relationship

by admin on January 19, 2010

By : Susan Jacob, Ph.D.

He promised “it will never happen again”

“Alice wanted help with her marriage. She explained that their biggest problem was that her husband Bret continued to lie to her. He promised her over and over again to cut down on his drinking. He would get angry when he drank too much. Alice described hiding in the bathroom with the door locked when Bret drank. He yelled and threw things. After each incident Bret promised he would limit his drinking to a couple of beers. Bret explained that it was not that bad as it did not happen every day. Bret explained that he could hold his liquor better than most people. He was sure he was not an alcoholic he did not drink every day and he knew plenty of people who drank more than he did. Bret said it was silly for Alice to be afraid of him. He had never really hurt her. Bret agreed he had broken a few things and yelled at her but that Alice was making a bigger deal of this than it was she acted like it happened all the time. He explained that if she would just “lay off and quick her nagging he would drink less.”

Alice wanted help with her nagging so she would not cause Bret to drink so much. They both agreed that with good communication his promises would come true. It would never happen again.



Is that what is really going on, however?

Lying and anger is more of a problem than alcohol.

It's not an addiction if it's not every day.

Just need to cut down.

There's no problem. I can hold my liquor.

Alcohol isn't the problem; all the nagging is why I drink.

It'll never happen again.

Six wishes about alcoholism and marriage and why they don't come true

"Alcohol is not the problem; the biggest problem is the lying and anger."

The first wish didn't become true because Alcohol is the problem, Bret's lying and angry behaviors are the worst symptoms of Alcohol Abuse for Alice to cope with. Alcohol is the problem that leads to Bret's behavior.

This wish is like being very upset because you have a runny nose with your cold. Thinking the cold is not the problem doesn't make sense. Colds do give you a runny nose. Bret's alcohol problem leads to lying to first to him than to Alice. Inappropriate anger is the result of how the alcohol affects the brain.

"Alcohol is not an addiction if it is not every day, or if you know someone who is worse."

The second wish didn't come true because most people with alcohol problems do not drink every day. Bret uses the idea that he is fine if he does not drink everyday to convince him and others he does not have a problem with Alcohol. There will always be someone who drinks more. That does not change Bret's problem.

"I just need to cut down to a few beers and I will be fine."

The third wish did not become true because Bret could not drink a few beers for very long. Bret's few beers will turn back to many very soon. It is a slippery slope. He will have a few and then a few more and soon he has lost control. Beer and wine are the most common drinks of people with Alcohol problems. Bret has made drinking too important in his life.

"I do not have a problem; I can really hold my liquor."

The fourth wish was not true because Bret holding his liquor means he has a high tolerance for alcohol. That is not a good sign. Tolerance is one of the symptoms of alcoholics.

“If someone else changes the problem will go away. If she would just not bug me I wouldn’t need to drink so much.”

The fifth wish was not true because Bret is responsible for his drinking. Alice is not the cause. She cannot make him drink or make him stop. It is up to Bret. Alice wished she could simply learn to communicate and not nag and the problem would go away.

“It will never happen again.”

The sixth wish did not come true because Bret meant to keep his promises every time he made one. He thought he could easily just cut down. Bret did not want to give up drinking. He was insulted that anyone would suggest he had an Alcohol Problem.

So, think about it

If an alcoholic tries to pin his or her behavior on you, stand back, take a breath, and analyze the situation logically. Is the problem you? Or, is the problem the alcohol?