A Radical Guide to Managing Your Drug Use

Your ideas about drug use are wrong.

The DEA pretends drugs are a binary: good or evil, dangerous or safe, abusable or non-addictive. This whole foundation is fake and misleading. Addiction is a spectrum and changes constantly, the risk and harms of any drug can be wildly unpredictable, what works for one person can kill someone else. Drugs are tricky, but we aren't helpless and can manage our use.

Drug use is about as common a human behavior as sex. We've always done drugs, we probably always will. Rather than framing drugs and our relationship to them in a binary we need to break everything down a bit. Drug use is just another behavior like jogging, jerking off or dancing to jumpstyle. Drug use is not supernaturally evil or good. Jogging can blow your knees out, jerking off can make your bits raw and dancing to jumpstyle is explicitly against my doctor's orders. Yet jogging can keep us healthy, jerking off is nice and relaxing and dancing to jumpstyle is awesome if your joints are strong!

What causes addiction?

What makes any given drug addictive varies wildly between people, for some people meth is the worst experience on the planet and even one use is PTSD inducing. For other people meth is fucking awesome, fun and makes cleaning the house a joy not a chore.

Drugs and other things cause addiction when the substance fulfills an unmet need in our lives. Whether that's being awake and able to focus, socializing, ignoring our bodies, relief from pain, giggling at dumb jokes or a respite from oppression. When we have an unmet need and no easy way to satisfy it without drugs, there's a tendency to keep using even to the point of self destruction. We often don't even recognize when this is happening.

Addiction is kept at bay by having a life that is worth living and being present for. Addiction doesn't happen because you have the secret addict soul type, addiction happens because of circumstances and causes.

Controlled & Managed Drug Use

There are a bunch of factors that lead to controlled and managed drug use. This section is adapted from "Controlled and Managed Heroin Use" (Warburton, Hamish et al. 2005). Consider giving it a read for more insights into managing your drug use.

Life Commitments

Having things in our life that we want or need to be functional/sober for. That can be a job, close relationships, general obligations like laundry or taxes, responsibilities like kids, pets or your weekly DnD game. Even wanting to play an instrument well helps us manage.

Using Environment (the setting)

Where and who you use drugs with has a big impact. When using alone it's easier to do more. Some events we really wanna attend high like raves or bar shows. Having friends who all use drugs means you'll use some too. Having friends who are all sober means you'll use less.

Using Rules

Rules you develop through experience or within a social group help manage. That can be a frequency rule (1x a week), dosage restriction and more. Having a line to work off of is way easier than playing it by ear. You can always change your mind but make that change intentional and not spur of the moment.

Previous Experience

Having personally experience with dependency and problem use, or being close to someone who has, can have a managing effect on our drug use. Knowing how bad it was or could be helps us pump the brakes.

External Pressures and Perceptions

A society, culture and social network that reflects managed drug use helps us manage ours. Absolutes or ignorance makes it harder for us to find a safer way forward. Likewise extremely permissive or encouraged drug use can make it harder to manage our own.

Never underestimate the strength of how the world around you affects you. Even the parts we reject stay with us.

Individual Factors (the set)

Your individual attitude towards different drugs as well as your body/brain impacts your use. If stims cause a harsh comedown you'll use them less. If you're very resistant to a hangover and have a strong immune system it's easier to drink more. Many drugs are an acquired taste.

The Drug

The frequency, dosage, availability and desired effects are major players in managed use. Using frequently at high doses while seeking total oblivion is a recipe for disaster. Having a few hoops to jump through to get a given drug does a lot to curb overusing.

These factors all relate and impact one another. Don't think of this as a single option sort of deal, a healthy or less harmful relationship to drugs depends on all of these factors in different amounts for different people.

Sometimes the easiest and best choice is abstinence based sobriety. Never assume you must keep using to be happy, fit in, get relief or escape. Sometimes getting sober is the best move, even if just for a little bit.

Evaluating Our Behavior

When we start to think about our behavior it's important to start with a *nonjudgmental* framing: describe what's happening the way a disinterested alien anthropologist might. Think about what's actually happening, just the facts, not our interpretations or what a given thing "says about us" or how your mom thinks about it.

Try to focus on the consequences:

- Does this get me what I value?
- Does this move me closer or further from my goals?
- Is this causing me suffering?
- Is this causing me joy, satisfaction or relief from suffering?

This isn't a DARE setup where all the answers are "Satan lives in the pipe" or some BS. We do drugs for a reason, so be real about those reasons. Sometimes we wanna have fun with our friends, sometimes we don't wanna feel anxious, sometimes we wanna escape a hard situation, sometimes we wanna fully engage with community or be present at our kid's game. Drugs can and do support all of those goals, so ask yourself if fulfilling those goals with drugs is helping, hurting or not really changing the outcome.

Sometimes we take painkillers so we can carry the soccer nets and coach the game. Sometimes we use adderall to push ourselves too hard. Sometimes we take molly to dance all night at the rave. Sometimes we use drugs for and as self-harm. Sometimes we smoke weed to make the tiny injustices of being poor easier to forget. Just be real with yourself and check in frequently.

You aren't an evil or bad person if you clock your drug use as making your life worse. You don't deserve punishment because you use drugs to cope or have fun. Be compassionate with yourself, understanding and realistic about your situation and drug use.

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