

# Understanding Denial



- Addicts have a definition of addiction that excludes them.
- Addicts focus on symptoms of addiction that they do not have and use this information to avoid self-diagnosis.
- Addicts change their definition over time to exclude worsening symptoms.

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- ▶ Alcohol or drug addicts with job problems who are in denial about their addiction are often convinced that other problems cause their job performance shortcomings. Such employees are able to convince the supervisor that these other problems are primary.
- ▶ This is the first step toward prolonged toleration of performance problems by supervisors. They become convinced they understand the employee's problems and begin to accommodate tolerate these problems as they grow worse. (Spouses of alcoholics do the same thing.)
- ▶ Denial is a defense mechanism that works hand-in-hand with myths and misconceptions about addiction. Denial is used to avoid awareness and is reinforced by others who are willing to participate in it.
- ▶ By the time an employee's alcohol or drug problem affects the work situation, he or she usually knows there is at least some small relationship between life's problems and the alcohol or drug use. This, however, does not mean the addict will talk about it or is self-diagnosed. Far from it. Still, this reality is what makes referral and treatment possible. An addict does not have to want help in order for it to work. Motivation to accept help comes in the treatment period as a result of re-education and self-diagnosis.

**Instructor's Additional Notes:**