

Signs of a High Functioning Addict

or **HFA**

A high functioning addict is often one who defies the stereotype of a person afflicted with addiction. The high functioning addict is often in a position of responsibility, functioning within their family and respected by their peers.

The high functioning addict is often a doctor, a CEO, a lawyer or even a professional homemaker – an achiever who is driven by a need to excel, who works long hours balancing multiple responsibilities and faces pressure in the home or workplace on a daily basis. They often work in environments that are conducive to social substance use, and abuse substances to supposedly alleviate the stress encountered in their lives.

Below are three behaviors that indicate someone may be a high functioning addict

1. He or she considers their substance abuse a reward or a coping tool. A functional addict will often view their addiction as a ritual used to wind down, say after a day of high level negotiations or parent teacher conferences. It can be a bottle of wine after the kids have gone to sleep or a couple of pain killers after the day's final conference call. Conversely, some high functioning addicts see their substance abuse as a much-needed pep to get through the day, such as the use of a stimulant to enhance focus before working on a demanding and time consuming project.
2. His or her inability to control the amount of alcohol or drugs consumed. Many high functioning addicts develop an obsession with drugs and or alcohol. This behavior can lead to hanging out with other heavy users, getting inebriated to the point of blacking out, and acting out of character when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, when engaged in their professional life, the high functioning addict seems in full control. Yet their addiction progresses and may lead to reckless behavior that can put everything that is important to them at risk and undermine their overall wellbeing.
3. Disregarding the consequences of his or her substance abuse. Since the high functioning addict is in denial and does not see his or her addiction as a problem, they may be blind to the physical and psychological complications that arise with continued heavy substance abuse. Failing to meet a project deadline or missing a meeting with their child's teacher are not seen as a result of their continued substance abuse, but as simply being "tired" or having a "lot on their plate". The effects of substance abuse are initially subtle, but may snowball into an issue that leads to the loss of public esteem and personal health.

