Substance Abuse

Not all substance use is problematic
For some people, drug and alcohol use can seem like fun. It can seem exciting, can be a means to blow off steam, can be a way to bond with others, can be a way to loosen up, can feel like a rite of passage, etc. Recreational use of substances is common in our culture. Some people view college as a natural time to try substances whether it is legal or not.

But...
For others, substance use can lead to problems. If you come from a family where you have relatives that have struggled with addiction, it is important to recognize that you may be at higher risk for developing a substance use problem yourself. If you find that you have an unusually high tolerance – that you can use more of a substance than most people can before feeling intoxicated – that can actually be a sign that you are more vulnerable for developing a substance use problem yourself.

Signs of a Potential Problem

Here are some other signs that substance use is no longer recreational or social or that it could be developing into a problem:

1) Substances are often taken in larger amounts than intended
2) Substances are often taken over a longer period of time than intended
3) There is a persistent desire to cut down or control use, but efforts to do so are unsuccessful
4) A great deal of time is spent in substance-related activities like:
   a. Obtaining the substance
   b. Using the substance
   c. Recovering from the effects of the substance
5) There are cravings, urges, or strong desires to use substances
6) Recurrent substance use is leading to failures to fulfill responsibilities at work, school, or home
7) Recurrent social or personal problems are either causes or worsened by substance use, but the substance use continues anyway
8) Important activities are given up or reduced because of substance use, including:
   a. Social activities
   b. Occupational activities
   c. Recreational activities
9) Substance use recurs in situations in which it is physically hazardous
10) Substance use is continued even when it might be contributing to a recurrent or persistent physical or psychological problem
If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have a substance use problem, you might consider talking with a counselor at PACS. Self-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, or Narcotics Anonymous can also be great resources for support for both those who struggle with substance use disorders and for their family members.

Adapted from DSM-5: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fifth Edition, 2013, American Psychiatric Association