

COUNSELING RESISTANT CHEMICALLY DEPENDENT MEN

BY

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Counseling is a feeling sport, and many men are taught to hide their feelings from the time they are little boys. Thus, many men resist counseling. Today, a large percentage of chemically dependent men are mandated to treatment by their employers or the criminal justice system, which leads to resistance to counseling. Below is a list of strategies to help you engage resistant chemically dependent men in addictions treatment.

- Examine the nature of the resistance. Is he resistant to change, counseling, or you (the therapist)? If he is resistant to change, it is important to move at a slow pace in counseling. One way to do this is to utilize the five stages of change, identified by Prochaska and DiClemente. These stages include: 1) precontemplation (he doesn't have a clue that he has a problem); 2) contemplation (he knows there is a problem, but he is ambivalent toward change); 3) determination (he is ready to do something about the problem, but he has not done it yet); 4) action (he is changing); 5) maintenance (he has been sober for six months or longer).
- Examine your feelings about men. Many counselors have strong negative countertransference reactions to men, often based upon their experiences interacting with men in the real world, including abusive fathers, uncles, husbands, male friends, etc. In addition, men are disproportionately perpetrators of violence toward women, other men, and children. If counselors harbor

negative countertransference reactions to men, they should be on guard to ensure that these feelings do not negatively impact their relationships with male clients.

- Focus on a strength and something that he does well as soon as possible. Many men enter addictions treatment feeling that they have failed. Focusing on his strengths can help him feel better about being there.
- Give a tour. Showing where the coat room is located as well as the bathroom and where he might purchase a snack or get coffee or tea can help decrease resistance to counseling even before the first session begins.
- Allow him to openly talk about not needing to be there. This approach will help him to bond with you, the counselor, even if he does not believe he belongs there.
- If he has difficulty expressing feelings in counseling, give him a list. "Are you feeling angry? sad? hurt?"
- Avoid early labels, such as, "You're an alcoholic." Early diagnosis without rapport can lead to increased resistance to counseling or premature termination.
- If he has been mandated, ask the leverage question:

Counselor: "You mentioned that your spouse is on your back, as well as the probation officer, and the judge is constantly telling you what to do."

Client: That's correct.

Counselor (leverage question): How would you like to get them off your back?

Client: I would love to get them off my back!

Counselor: What would it take to get them off your back?

Client: A letter from you.

Counselor: What would that letter have to read?

Client: I attended all my individual and group sessions.

Counselor: Is that the plan?

Client: Yes.

This particular client is not any closer to acknowledging that he has an alcohol or drug problem; however, by asking the leverage question, he has gone from being a mandated client to a volunteering one.