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Are You Dating a Future Alcoholic?

Since drinking goes with dating, the dating game is an ideal opportunity to see how your favorite man or woman handles alcohol. Here, based on my clinical experience, are seven helpful hints on how to recognize a “love boat” that is headed for the rocks.

How important is alcohol?

- Have you wondered why drinking is so important to your lover? Has your own drinking increased since you met him? Do you sometimes drink just to be with him, -- even if you don't feel like drinking?
- Does he smell of booze when he comes to pick you up? always with a ready-made excuse about why he just had to have a drink with so-and-so?
- Does every occasion begin -- and end -- with drinks? Does he make sure there will be drinks available, regardless of the occasions? And if there isn't any alcohol when you get there, will he go to any lengths to get some, even though others would just as soon not bother?
- Does he always urge -- or push -- you and your friends to “have one more?” Does he want the drinking to go on when others want to quit and go home? And the next morning, is he the first one up -- without a hangover -- and having a beer, while everybody else feels under the weather? (Many future alcoholics don't have hangovers until late in their disease.)
- Does he use drinking to handle stressful situations? When you want to “talk,” does he say, “lemme get a drink first” -- as he pours himself a double? And the next morning, does he not remember the discussion? (That's called an alcoholic blackout.)
- Have you ever had sex with him when he hadn't been drinking? Does he look uncomfortable or incredulous when you suggest that sometimes maybe you want to do it without drinking?
- Can he drink amazing amounts -- and not show the effects? (That's called high tolerance for alcohol and other sedative drugs.)

If you've nodded “yes” to some of these points, your lover may be a budding alcoholic or a full-blown, still functioning alcoholic at the height of his tolerance. In either case, he may be headed for the rocks, while you are being groomed as his future caretaker.

Is there an alcohol problem?

So, does your lover have a problem? If you think he does -- he probably does! To find out how bad it is, you need to discuss it with him. If he refuses to discuss it, he's got a problem.

If you actually do discuss it with him -- with or without professional counseling -- he'll either cut down successfully or stop drinking altogether, with or without help.

If he does neither -- but keeps making promises instead of changes, you both have a problem.

How can I say you both have a problem? Because you do. His problem is how to control alcohol; and your problem is how to get off that “Love Boat” while there is still time.

Well, I hear you say, that's easier said than done. He is so “interesting,” i.e. bright, charming, fun loving and titillatingly impulsive; even the darker sides of his character -- the moodiness, the brooding -- make him mysterious and dangerously attractive. (That's why some people spend a lifetime with a succession of such drinkers. They are fun -- while they last.)

Overall, the best guideline is this: How consistently does he keep his word when it comes to his drinking? A prominent show-biz socialite who had a roller-coaster lifetime of heartbreaks with several alcoholics, wistfully summarized the problem like this: “Somewhere in this world there must be a man who can say, ‘I'm going to have a martini -- and then do exactly that.’”

P.S. Ladies! Please don't be put off by the gender slant of this article. When it comes to alcohol/drug problems, “he” and “she” are inter-changeable pronouns. Alcohol and drug problems are the first area in which women will achieve equality. And there are no glass ceilings, only glass crutches.

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