

# The Stages of Addiction

These are the stages a person goes through when becoming addicted to a drug.

- ① **First use**—The person tries a drug for the first time. People may experiment out of curiosity, to fit in because friends use, to rebel or to get high. The drug changes how the person feels.
- ② **Continued use**—The person keeps using the drug to feel a certain way. But, after the high is over, the brain doesn't return to normal right away. Brain changes from repeated drug use can last from several days to many weeks or months.
- ③ **Tolerance**—It takes more of the drug to get high. When a person develops *tolerance* it takes more of the drug to get high. This is because, over time, the brain adjusts to the drug, so it takes more to feel the effects. Tolerance is a warning sign of addiction.
- ④ **Dependence**—The person gets sick without the drug. The brain gets so used to the drug that it can't work without it. The person needs the drug to feel "normal." When the person stops using the drug, he or she gets sick and goes through *withdrawal*. The withdrawal symptoms go away when the person uses again. This is a sign of addiction.
- ⑤ **Addiction**—The person can't stop using the drug, even when the drug use causes serious problems. He or she will do just about anything to get the drug. The person may suffer negative health effects, spend all of his or her money on the drug, or lose friends and family because of the drug use. But he or she refuses to admit that the drug is the cause of these problems. *Denial* is a sign of addiction.