

# Denial Examined

By Jim Rachels



So what is denial and what does it have to do with addiction? Let's look at what denial actually means. From the Oxford Dictionary: "the action of declaring something to be untrue." I think denial is one of the things that so many have faced while in active addiction. I also think this is something that many people face, not just people with addiction issues. It is something that will consistently hold you back and stop you from progressing along your journey and a new life.

Denial is something that really does stop people from being able to take that first step and admit that they have a problem and that they're an addict. How are you to take that first step if you're in denial?

To take the first step you need to come to the point where you now realize you have been in denial for some time while in active addiction. You need to look back and really analyze the way you have been living your life. You need to address how much drugs, alcohol, or compulsive behaviors play a role in your life. Even if you do not plan on working a step program I still think it is extremely important that everyone at least takes the first step and admit they have a problem.

Most of us don't even realize that we're in denial and that's why we continue to use drugs or act compulsively. This can be a real self-deception as well as continuing on with self-destruction.

I think there are different phases to denial. I don't think it's just a one thought process. I think the first type of denial is blind denial. You don't even realize that you have a problem and are in absolute and complete denial. This is a terrible position to be in as you will continue on and on with your substance abuse or compulsive behaviors.

I think in the second stage the person somewhat starts to realize there is a problem with the way they have been living. They also might compare themselves to others and say that they are not as bad as the other person. Some opiate users may claim they are in pain and use painkillers thinking it's ok since it was given to them by a doctor. In some cases this is ok but for others it is not. But even though they have a problem they don't think that they need to reach out to a support group or anything like that. I think the person might have started having their actions affect family relationships and even maybe even having employment issues. Or they may feel since they are employed they don't have a problem. This is a dangerous and lonely place to be. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines denial as an involuntary "defense mechanism" that aims to ignore negative or unpleasant thoughts or feelings. Not being able to just admit that you need help from other forms of support can be dangerous. This is because even though the person is starting to realize they have a problem and need help they continue on using or acting compulsively. Many people will also get to the point where they feel that they are fine just being a

drunk or an addict for the rest of their lives. I remember one time I told my Mom "I'm not ever really doing well, but I'm ok with this." I thought I was ok just being the loser I was and it was going to be that way forever. The truth is I just had no idea how to ask for help I so desperately needed. Besides not knowing how to ask for help I was just honestly scared of a future without drugs and alcohol. I had been an addict for more than half my life. It's all I knew and it was a terrifying prospect of never using again.

So what can we do if we or someone we love is an addict in denial? I think one of the biggest things you can do is have compassion for that person. It might be difficult to do this as a lot of addicts will blame everyone around them but themselves for the problems they are facing. During this time it might be difficult to still show this person compassion. They are living a life that is self-destructive. They don't even see all the damage they are doing to themselves as well as others. They just drink to forget their problems and emotions and use their addiction of choice as a crutch. But this is when these people need compassion the most.

So how do we approach this situation? How do we actually talk to the addict in denial? One of the first things I read through my research about this is when it comes to talking with the addict leave it up to the professionals. I agree with this to a certain degree but I think having both professionals and family there would be helpful. I think one thing that is important is to talk to this person about the way their addiction is making you feel and affecting you. Another thing to remember is always try to engage them while they are sober. They are not in the right state of mind while they are using and it will be difficult to have a meaningful conversation with them. Make sure you emphasize that you love them very much and you simply want the best for them and that's why you want them to go seek professional help.

Don't ever just place blame and speak down to them. This does no good as far as progressing their sobriety. This is something that can lead to the person you are trying to help to be nonreceptive to what is going on. It can end up just making things worse than they already are. Before anyone will be willing to seek treatment they might have to go through the process of denial many times before they realize that they truly need help. But having people there to encourage them during their recovery would be a great help.

One thing you can do is use things to motivate them to seek the help they need. If they have recently done something like yell at someone or anything they regret you can certainly bring that up when you try to speak with them. Use that to your advantage. This might help that person see that what they are doing is also affecting others not just themselves. This

might be something you could use in your favor to help give the person you are trying to help that extra push to seek treatment.

Denial is something that stunts our growth in recovery. Many of us need to face our demons and look at the things we have been ignoring for so long. We cannot continue on the way we have been living. To continue on this way most end up in one of three situations, the hospital, jail, or dead. Unfortunately, this has been shown time and time again to ring true for so many people. We need to see that this way of living is simply not working and leading us down a dark path. We need to develop a program for ourselves and build the proper support system so this way if we can make our way out of denial we will have this support to lean on in times of need.

For us to get our lives back on track we need to face our demons. We need to understand that denial is a difficult thing to face head-on. Many of us have been in denial for so long it has become a part of who we are. We need to work on changing this. We need to look at ourselves in the mirror and truly come to terms with who we really are. In the end, denial needs to be addressed to move farther in your recovery and is something that you will need to continuously deal with throughout the rest of your life.