A Shot of Liquid Courage or More?
By Dean Mattox, M.S.

For many, using alcohol means fun times with friends, relaxing after work or school with a beer or glass of wine or even a shot of liquid courage. There are some, however, that alcohol takes to a darker place. It may become a substitute for coping skills not learned or easily applied. There are many causes of alcohol dependence. Scientists have identified a genetic predisposition but there is so much more involved. Not everyone who is genetically predisposed develops dependence on alcohol and others without genetic predisposition become alcoholics.

Misuse of alcohol is a serious problem and has effects on the individual and society as a whole. Disruption of families, traffic accidents and arrests are only part of the picture. Alcohol use has been shown to lower workplace productivity and increases the possibility of workplace injuries. Alcohol use also increases the likelihood of aggression, partner violence, and child abuse.

If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, there are some indicators you can use. Answer the following questions honestly.

Have you ever decided to stop drinking for a period of time but were unable to? Do you wish other people would stop talking to you about your drinking? Have you ever switched from one type of alcohol to another type to try to control your drinking? Have you ever needed a little “hair of the dog” or an eye-opener drink in the morning to get going? Do you envy people who can drink without getting into trouble? Have you had problems because of your drinking in the last year? Is your drinking causing trouble in your friendships, family, or romantic relationships? Do you have a few drinks before going to a party in case you can’t get enough when you get there? Have you told yourself that you can stop any time but find you get drunk even when you don’t mean to? Have you missed days of work or school because of your drinking? Have you ever had a blackout while drinking? Have you ever thought your life would be better if you did not drink? (Questions adapted from A.A. Brochure, Is A.A. for you?)

If you answered yes to four or more of the questions above you have the potential to develop a problem with alcohol if you have not already. If you would like a second opinion you may take an anonymous alcohol screening at http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/TEXASCOMMERCE

What can we do if we are concerned that someone we care about may be alcohol dependent? First, remember that alcoholism is not the result of a lack of will or morals. Alcoholism is an illness. Try to avoid declaring them an alcoholic. This is realization that each must come to on their own. You should talk to them about how their drinking is affecting you. Issuing ultimatums that they must get help can cause defensiveness and may backfire. Express your concern for this person and let them know you are willing to help if they decide they want to address the issue.

If you are a currently enrolled student and would like to speak with a counselor about this or other issues, please contact the Counseling Center at (903) 886-5145. There are multiple organizations to help people address alcohol dependence and your counselor could help you find one appropriate for you.

Since 1987 the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCAAD) has designated April as Alcohol Awareness month and the first weekend in April as Alcohol-Free weekend. The purpose of the effort is to increase awareness and understanding of alcoholism, its causes, effective treatment and recovery. During the Alcohol Free weekend, April 1-3, NCAAD invites all Americans to abstain from the use of alcohol for three days with the idea that those who struggle during the weekend may want to take a look at their alcohol use.