

Working Together to Manage Substance Use and Mental Health Issues

Doug (39) is a teacher who lives with his wife of 10 years Jacqui and their three daughters (Ebony 6, Annabel 3 and Jacinta 2). Over the past six months or so, Doug has been drinking a bottle and a half of wine each night and on occasions, when the girls are in bed he drinks between three to four bottles, sometimes passing out. Generally the heavier drinking occurs on a Friday night, giving him time to recover for school by Monday. He also dabbles with cannabis, but this is usually restricted to when he spends extended periods of time with his mates every couple of weeks.

A couple of recent drinking binges have been on a Thursday, after a hard day at work, and he has arrived a little late to school the following morning, to find his first class being led by the Assistant Principal. On these occasions he has used the excuse that his youngest daughter has been ill through the night, but he confessed to Jacqui that he is worried that his appearance and the lingering smell of alcohol will *"give him away."*

Doug was really happy to become a father when Ebony arrived, and until more recently, he and Jacqui have mainly enjoyed a strong relationship. Jacqui complains to him that he has become withdrawn from both her and the children and that he *"really needs to step up and help out with the girls more often."*

Jacqui works part-time in administration and relies on Doug to pick the kids up from school and daycare a couple of times a week. He forgot one of the pick-ups last week and Jacqui called him in a panic to see where he was. She had received a call from daycare, asking why Annabel and Jacinta hadn't been collected. He explained to Jacqui that he was grabbing a quiet drink with a mate he hadn't seen for ages and couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. He was only a few minutes late for the daycare pick-up and their eldest, Ebony was at a friend's house.

When Jacqui arrived home, the questions and criticisms continued. He found himself becoming increasingly frustrated, lost his temper and threw a dinner plate in her direction. Jacqui barely spoke to him for days after this, even though he apologised profusely. When she did speak, she kept saying *"you need to get help. We can't keep going on like this. If you don't do something, I will leave and take the girls with me."*

Three days later, Doug relented and made an appointment to see his GP saying to Jacqui *"I'm going to see the doc, happy now...?"*

**Mental Health
Professionals' Network**

Emirates House
Level 8
257 Collins Street
Melbourne
VIC 3000

postal
PO Box 203
Flinders Lane
VIC 8009

email
contactus@mhpnp.org.au

telephone
1800 209 031

www.mhpnp.org.au

Doug's Story continued.....

During the GP appointment, Doug reveals that Jacqui insisted on him coming and that she is becoming concerned about him and his drinking. He goes on to say that he has noticed that he is starting to *"hang out"* for a drink at night, and during the day often thinks about having a drink after work.

A check of Doug's history reminds the GP that Doug experienced an episode of severe depression about eight years ago, but responded well to antidepressant medication, despite drinking quite heavily at the time.

The GP asks about any other symptoms that Doug might be experiencing, and Doug recalls that he has been thinking a bit about an episode from his childhood prior to going into foster care. Recently he has experienced some repeated nightmares, but went on to say that *"a good drinking session seems to make them stop for a while."*

Did you know . . .

MHPN has a series of webinars that cover a range of topical mental health issues.

Visit www.mhpn.org.au to learn more.