
How to Ask DSM-5 Focused Questions for Alcohol Use Disorder

Introduction

Alcohol use disorder (AUD), as defined in the DSM-5, includes 11 criteria. While most experienced clinicians can diagnose AUD without going through a formal checklist of DSM symptoms, we suggest you try using this sheet during interviews. You are likely to find it helpful in at least two ways.

First, you can use the criteria to more accurately categorize the severity of your patient's AUD:

- Mild: two DSM-5 criteria
- Moderate: three to five DSM-5 criteria
- Severe: more than five DSM-5 criteria

Second, you can use the criteria to show your patient that there are relatively objective medical symptoms leading to the diagnosis of AUD. This lessens the stigma attached to the diagnosis and shows that you are a well-trained professional, enhancing your credibility and hopefully helping your patient trust your recommendations.

Below, we suggest questions for each of the 11 criteria. Although the DSM-5 doesn't explicitly divide the criteria into categories, we find it helpful to do so, and below we list them under four broad clusters: impairment of control, social consequences, risky behavior, and tolerance/withdrawal.

Questions About Time Spent Obtaining Alcohol (Impairment of Control)

1. *Cravings*: "Do you have cravings (urges to drink)?"
2. *Using more than planned*: "Do you often drink more than you really want to or intend to?"
3. *Unable to quit despite attempts to do so*: "Have you tried to cut down or quit drinking before?" "What is the longest time you have been abstinent? How long ago was that?"
4. *Significant time spent obtaining or recovering from alcohol*: "How often do you go to the liquor store?" "How long do you spend at the bar?" "How many hours per day do you avoid family or work because of drinking or recovering from drinking?"

Questions About Activities Given Up Over Time Due to Drinking (Social Consequences)

5. *Activities given up due to drinking*: "Are you spending less time with your family than before?" "Have you avoided going out because you prefer to stay home to drink?"
6. *Failure to fulfill major role obligations*: "Have you had to take time off from work because of drinking?" "Have you called in sick to work after drinking?"
7. *Persistent social and interpersonal problems*: "How much time do you spend socializing in settings that don't involve alcohol? Is this less time than before?" "Do you have arguments with friends or family due to drinking?" "Have you lost friends?"

Questions About Use in Hazardous Situations (Risky Behavior)

8. *Recurrent use in physically hazardous situations*: "Have you ever driven after drinking? Have you ever had a DUI charge? Have you ever had a charge for being drunk in a public place (public intoxication)? Have you ever drank while on the job?"
9. *Continued use despite knowledge of negative consequences*: "Have you continued to drink after a doctor told you about medical problems caused by drinking?"

Questions About Tolerance and Withdrawal

10. *Tolerance*: "Do you need to drink more than you previously did to get a buzz or to get drunk?"
11. *Withdrawal*: "Have you been through alcohol withdrawal before?" "Have you had problems getting to sleep after drinking?"