Addiction Potential

What is the difference between use, abuse, and addiction?
Drug use is a term used to describe the context in which a drug is used and the short-term consequences associated with its use.

Drug abuse is a term used to describe a situation in which a drug negatively affects every aspect of someone’s life (e.g., home, work, school, relationships, etc.).

People who continue to use a drug despite these negative consequences will typically go on to develop an addiction.

The invisible “X factor” that also plays a role in the development of a drug addiction is genetics. It is important to understand one’s family history with regard to addiction and mental illness to recognize increased risk or propensity for addiction.

How does drug abuse become addiction?
Drug addiction is composed of three factors: tolerance, psychological dependence, and physical dependence.

Tolerance is a term to describe that, over time, an individual needs more and more of a drug to achieve the desired high. Tolerance is an indicator of the body’s changing chemistry in response to the frequency and quantity of use.

Psychological dependence is a term to describe the fact that the user believes that they need more and more of a drug to function normally, whether or not the body actually signals a need for the drug to function normally.

Physical dependence is a term used to describe the fact that a user must continue to use the drug in increasing quantities to function normally. If they decrease or stop use, the user experiences withdrawal symptoms and taking the drug will alleviate some of the withdrawal symptoms.

When a drug has high potential for all three of these factors, in combination with the “X factor” (family history of addiction), it is said to have high addictive potential. Simply because a drug does not have high addictive potential, however, does not mean it is safe or prudent to use.