

# Involuntary treatment

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When the use of intoxicants is prolonged and the family or the authorities cannot influence it, involuntary treatment is often considered. The current law on the treatment of intoxicant abuse relatively clearly defines the situations where involuntary treatment can be carried out. Services based on the client's own initiative are, however, considered primary. If voluntary treatment is not possible or it has proved insufficient, a person may, on the basis of health risk or assumed violence, be compelled to undergo treatment.

Health risk means that if the client does not stop using intoxicants and have treatment, his life is in danger or there is a risk of health damage that would require immediate medical attention. The client can be compelled to undergo treatment for a maximum of five days: this requires recommendations of two doctors.

On the basis of violence the head of the social welfare services of the municipality can, either on the recommendation or by approval of a social worker, make a decision about involuntary treatment of a maximum of five days. The decision must be confirmed by the provincial court, but it can be carried out immediately. A decision of this kind must be made if a person, because of his violent behaviour linked to the use of intoxicants, endangers the health, security or mental development of a family member or someone else. In addition to actual physical abuse, violent behaviour is considered to include deprivation of freedom, threatening or forcing.

Also repeated mental cruelty towards a child is considered violent behaviour. Threatening the child with violence, isolating him from his peers or constantly disturbing his sleep can at worst be forms of mental cruelty. If the five-day treatment period proves insufficient, the provincial court can, on the proposal of the social welfare board, oblige the person to undergo a maximum of 30 days of treatment on the basis of violence.

A person under the age of 18 cannot be compelled to undergo treatment without a special reason. Particularly valid justifications are needed and it must be shown that involuntary treatment is in the young client's best interest. Measures in accordance with the legislation on child protection and on mental health issues are usually more suitable for children even in those cases where the child is using intoxicants.

Engaging in compelling measures should always mean a commitment to even more intensive support and assistance than is usual. Compelling a client does not in itself solve the problem situation: at best it gives a little extra time to break the circle of violence, self-destruction and intoxicant use. Close co-operation between the client, his family and the authorities is usually needed in order to stop the problems from getting worse.

For more information on involuntary treatment contact your local health centre or a social worker.

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