

Struggling with a Loved One's Addiction to Alcohol, Drugs, Food or Gambling?

Over the years many families have asked me a question similar to this one: Our family is struggling to help a family member who is addicted to alcohol and has just entered an in-patient treatment program. This is very stressful. We are looking for support and information. Can you help us?

My Reply: It is understandable that your family would be feeling distressed at this time. Addictions are serious, complex problems that significantly impact the families of the individuals who are addicted. Often, by the time individuals seek professional help for their addiction, the family's life has changed in significant ways, and they are suffering their own emotional distress and feeling exhausted.

Often, in families with addiction problems, the members feel isolated and alone in their circumstances. By seeking information and reaching out to your family members you are initiating an opportunity for all of you to re-connect, heal, and strengthen yourselves.

Guilt, shame, frustration/anger, and fear, are some of the intense emotions experienced by family members and individuals with addictions. Talking together about the addiction, without judgement or blame, may help to remove the secrecy and stigma that interferes with recovery for all affected. This is potentially a time of rebuilding relationships in the family through positive sharing of experiences, emotions, thoughts, and comfort. Family members may also benefit from formal or informal support groups that offer ways to make positive social connections with individuals outside of the family who are living and getting past similar circumstances (e.g., 12-step, community services).

By educating yourselves about addictions you will increase your understanding in important ways, and improve your ability to recover and support your loved one's recovery from addiction, during and after treatment. Significant education will include why and how people develop

addictions, treatment approaches and options, recovery time (it's not a "quick fix"), why it's difficult to stop/recover from addiction (alcohol, other drugs, tobacco), and factors that help and hinder long-term addiction recovery.

For example, it is known that many variables influence the development of addiction to alcohol and drugs, including brain chemistry, social circumstances (e.g., family, peers), medical problems, psychological characteristics, personal coping abilities, and life experiences. The internet (e.g., Health Canada, HBO.ca/addictions), book stores, libraries, and community and private mental health and addiction services can be good sources of information on addictions.

The time of treatment and recovery for the addicted person is a time of recovery for the family members. When the addicted person enters treatment, the family's intense focus on their loved one usually decreases. This is an opportunity for family members to re-focus on their own needs, including re-engaging in leisure activities, friendships, work, and school, and seeking the help of positive support groups, and a knowledgeable Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC), when necessary to assist the recovery process.

I provide counselling and support for families and loved ones who are affected by someone's addiction to drugs, alcohol, food, gambling, or the internet. You don't have to get through it alone.

Please feel welcome to call me to arrange a free 20 minute consultation or full appointment.
250-702-7762.